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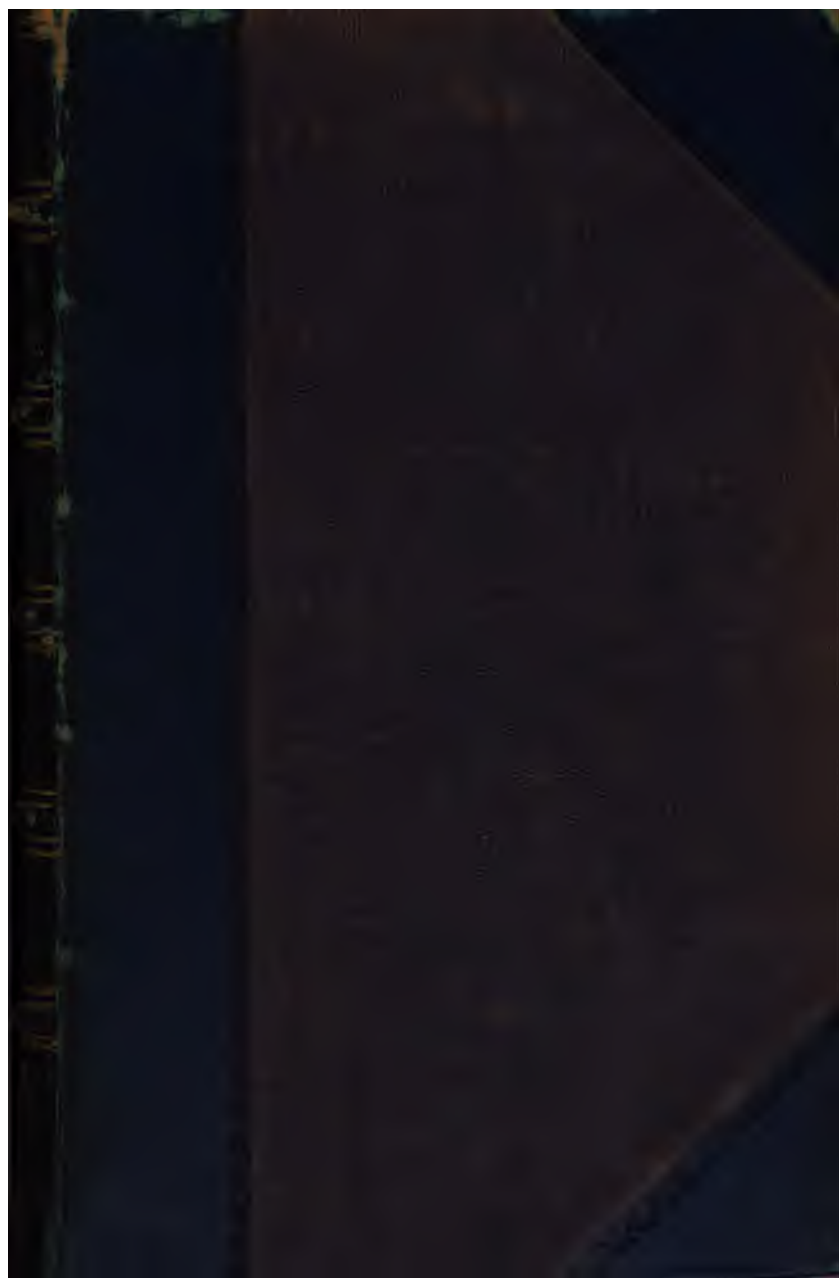
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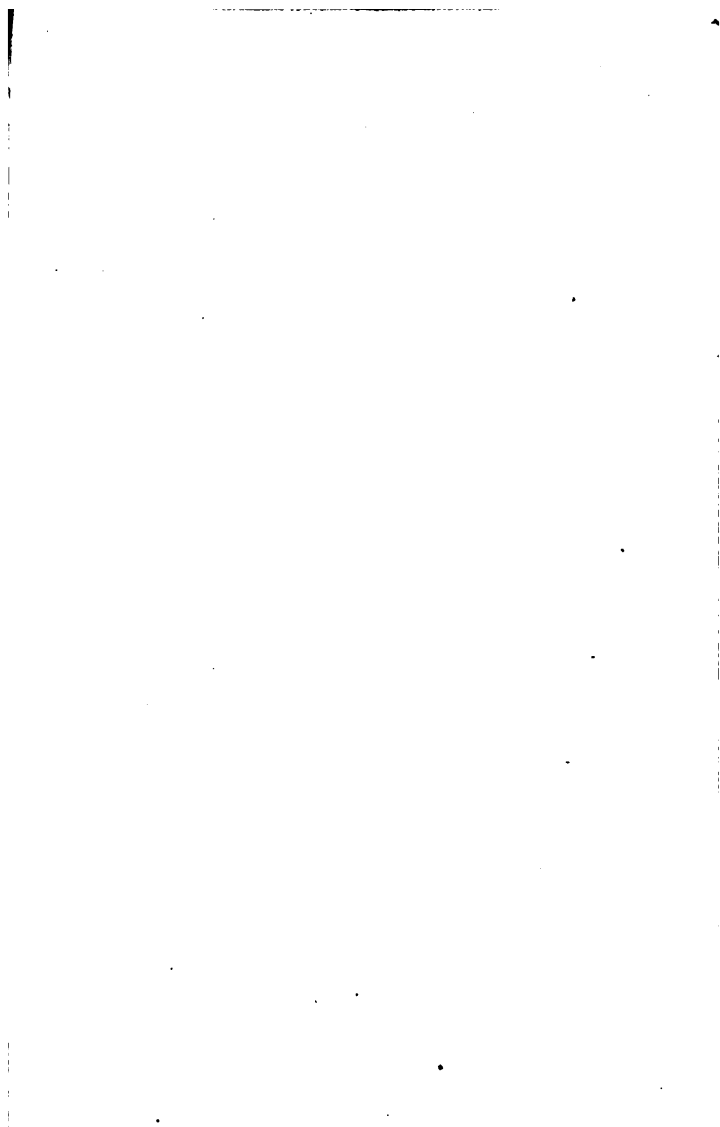




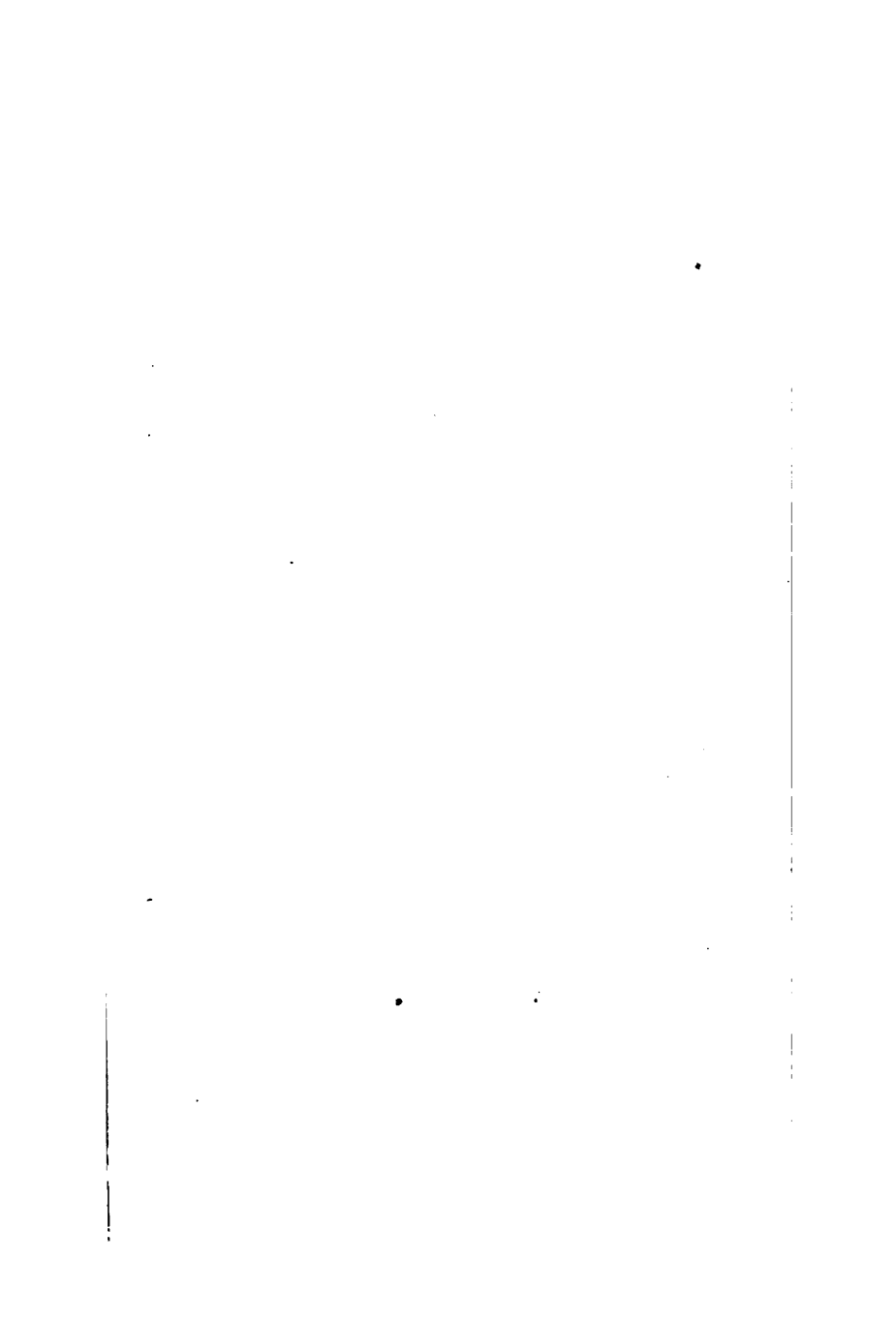
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EPITOME
OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE;
OR
A CONCENTRATION
OF THE MATTER OF
STANDARD ENGLISH AUTHORS.

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A. J. VALPY, M. A.

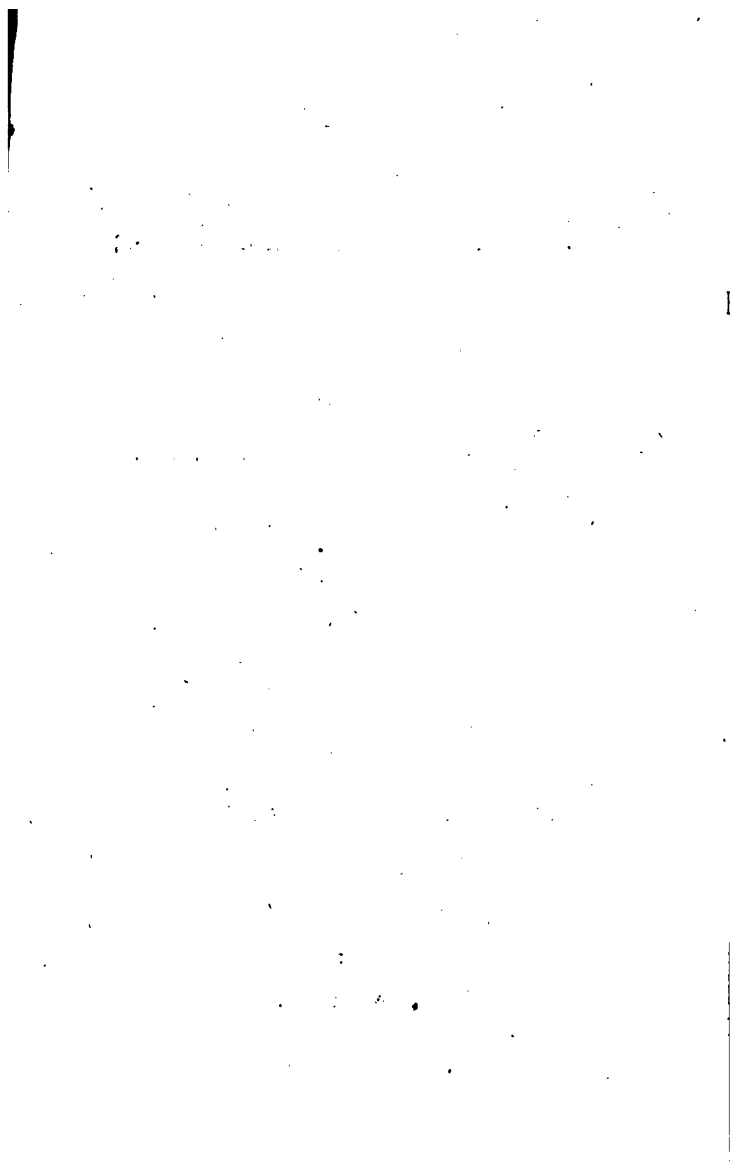
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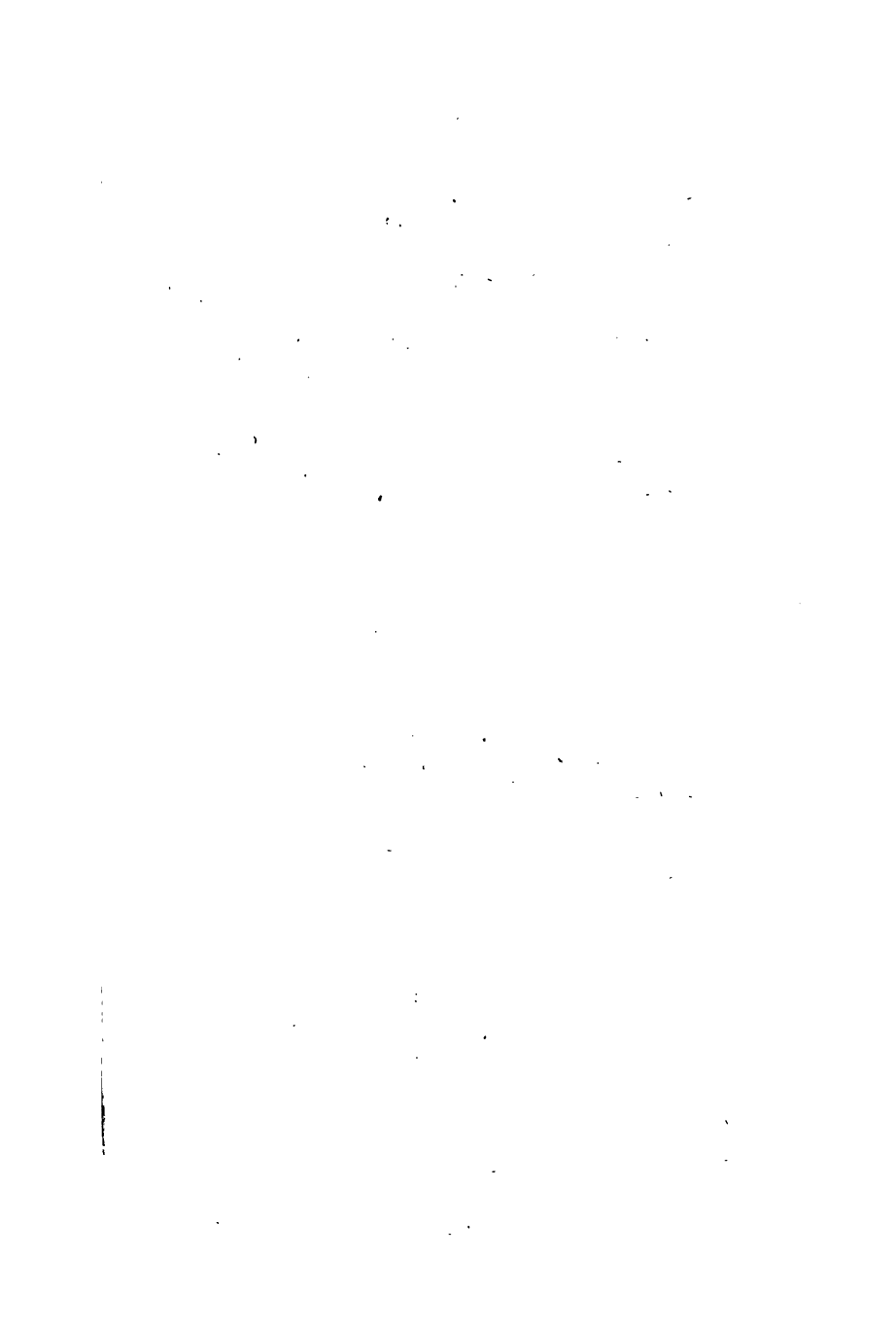
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CONTENTS.

	Page
PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS.	
Of the antecedent credibility of miracles	1

PART I.

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DIS- TINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

PROPOSITION I.

That there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of such accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct	6
CHAP. I. Evidence of the sufferings of the first propagators of Christianity, from the nature of the case	<i>ib.</i>
II. Evidence of the sufferings of the first propagators of Christianity, from profane testimony	12

	Page
CHAP. III. Indirect evidence of the sufferings of the first propagators of Christianity, from the Scriptures and other ancient Christian writings .	15
IV. Direct evidence of the sufferings of the first propagators of Christianity, from the Scriptures and other ancient Christian writings .	17
V. Observations on the preceding evidence .	26
VI. That the story, for which the first propagators of Christianity suffered, was miraculous	29
VII. That it was, in the main, the story which we have now, proved by indirect considerations	31
VIII. That it was, in the main, the story which we have now, proved from the authority of our historical Scriptures	41
IX. On the authenticity of the Scriptures	48
SECT. I. Quotations of the historical Scriptures by ancient Christian writers	53
II. Of the peculiar respect with which the Scriptures were quoted by ancient Christian writers	62
III. The Scriptures were in very early times collected into a distinct volume	65
IV. The Scriptures were distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect	66
V. The Scriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians	68
VI. Commentaries were anciently written on the Scriptures, and versions made of them into different languages	69
VII. Our Scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different sects and persuasions	71

CONTENTS.

vii

Page

. SECT. VIII. The four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, the first of John, and the first of Peter were received without doubt by those, who doubted concerning the other books included in our present canon	75
. IX. Our historical books were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as containing accounts on which the religion was founded	76
. X. Formal catalogues of authentic Scriptures were published, in all of which our present sacred histories were included	79
. XI. The above propositions cannot be predicated of those books, commonly called Apocryphal Books of the New Testament	80
CHAP. X. Recapitulation of the preceding arguments	82

PROPOSITION II.

There is not satisfactory evidence, that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain as these are, have passed their lives in dangers and difficulties, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief in such accounts.

CHAP. I. Consideration of the question generally	85
II. Consideration of some specific instances	97

PART II.

AUXILIARY EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

CHAP. I. Prophecy	103
II. The morality of the Gospel	107
III. The candor of the writers of the New Testament	121
IV. Identity of Christ's character	126

	Page
CHAP. V. Originality of our Saviour's character . . .	131
VI. Conformity of the facts occasionally mentioned or referred to in the New Testament with the state of things in those times, as represented by foreign and independent accounts . . .	132
VII. Undesigned coincidences	157
VIII. The history of the resurrection	159
IX. SECT. I. The propagation of Christianity . . .	161
II. Reflections on the preceding account . . .	169
III. Of the religion of Mahomet	173

PART III.

A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF SOME POPULAR
OBJECTIONS.

CHAP. I. The discrepancies between the several Gospels . . .	184
II. Erroneous opinions imputed to the apostles . . .	186
III. The connexion of Christianity with the Jewish history	188
IV. Rejection of Christianity	190
V. That the Christian miracles are not recited, or appealed to, by early Christian writers them- selves, so fully or frequently as might have been expected	197
VI. Want of universality in the knowlege and re- ception of Christianity, and of greater clear- ness in the evidence	202
VII. The supposed effects of Christianity	207
VIII. Conclusion	213

EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS.

Of the antecedent Credibility of Miracles.

I DEEM it needless to prove that man wanted a revelation ; because I presume that no serious person considers the light we possess superfluous. I desire further to remark, that in judging of Christianity the question is between that religion or none ; for if that be false, none other, it is presumed, will be considered true.

Let it, then, be granted that there has been a Creator, who is still the preserver of the world ; that the contrivances of creation prove the design of the Deity to consult the happiness of his creatures ; that man has been endowed by the Creator with free agency and the power of rendering obedience to God's will ; that, to promote the ends of justice as regards man, and to prevent the idea of inconsistency as regards the acts and designs of God, there exists a future state after death, where the situation of moral agents will be regulated by their conduct during life ; and that to persons to be so situated the knowledge of such future state is necessary to their present happiness ; but that such knowledge is from some cause un-

Paley Evid.

A

attainable by man ; is it probable or not, that God would interpose to reveal such knowlege otherwise unattainable ? If probable, could such revelation be made but by miracles ? If not, then it follows that the probability of the miracles themselves is not less than the probability of the interposition. But as the interposition is not of itself improbable, so neither can the miracles be rejected on the ground of improbability alone.

In thus stating the case, neither the attributes of the Deity, nor the existence of a future state, is assumed to prove the reality of the miracles, which must be supported by independent evidence : all we contend for is, that the incredibility of the miracles is not greater than the probability of the truth of one or both of the propositions following ; first, that God should destine man for a future state ; and, secondly, that he should reveal to man the knowlege of such destination ; neither of which is an event so contradictory to the attributes of the Deity, as to be rejected at once, despite the external evidence to be adduced in their favor.

The assertion then, that if there be a revelation there must be miracles ; and that under the circumstances in which man is placed, a revelation is not improbable, would be a fair answer to Hume's objection, that no human testimony can render a miracle credible.

But since this objection, if admitted, is a bar to every proof, it is necessary to examine the principles on which it is founded, viz. that it is contrary to experience for a miracle to be true, but not for testimony to be false.

In this proposition the terms 'experience,' and 'contrary to experience,' involve an ambiguity which it is necessary to remove.

Strictly speaking, the narrative of a fact is only then contrary to experience, when it relates to cir-

cumstances of time and place, unknown to or denied by parties, who were present when such event is said to have happened. In such case the narration of one opposed to the experience of many, presents a contrariety equally insurmountable, whether the fact be of a miraculous nature or not. But though such is the experience and contrariety intended by Tillotson, in the passage quoted by Hume, such is not the contrariety intended by Hume himself. There is, however, another signification to be given to the term 'contrary to experience,' viz. that the experience of an individual is at variance with the event related. But to assert that individual and general experience is one and the same thing, is to assume the very point in controversy, by confounding the want of experience in the individual with the contradiction arising from universal experience.

Now the improbability arising from the want of experience is only equal to the probability, that if the event were true, universal experience would confirm it.

Granting, then, that miracles were wrought, on the first promulgation of Christianity, when miracles alone could decide the authority of a new religion, is it certain that they would be so repeated, as to become objects of general experience? is it even probable that such repetitions would be made, when the effect of the repetition would be to destroy the very purpose for which the miracle was wrought? Yet this probability is the very converse, and therefore the correct measure of the improbability, which, says Hume, human testimony cannot, from the want of evidence, overcome.

The force of experience, as an objection to the credibility of miracles, is founded on the supposition, that the laws of God are invariable, or that the variations are frequent. Has this alternative been proved to be necessary? Is it even probable? Is it not

more natural to suppose, that as the Deity can, so he may, interrupt the usual order of events on occasions of peculiar importance?

Hence, as the occasions of such interruptions are of necessity few, so must the persons who witness them be comparatively few also; nor can the want of experience in the many be brought to disprove the testimony of the few.

But it is said, that in the case of miracles, effects are assigned to causes either not existing, or inadequate, or contrary to experience. For instance, the cure of the palsy is ascribed to the touch, of blindness to the anointing of the eyes with clay, and the raising of the dead to a mere word. To this we reply, that the acts so designated as causes are merely signs to connect the miracle with its proposed end; but that the whole and sole efficient cause is the hand of God; in whose power if we believe, miracles will cease to be incredible.

Hume says, and fairly so, that the question is, 'whether it be more improbable that the miracle be true than that the testimony be false?' In this view, the miracles are equally incredible to the believer and infidel. But, as he supposes the controversy to be between two parties not atheists, he does not act equally fair in suppressing all the circumstances connected with our knowledge of the existence, power, and disposition of the Deity; the object of the miracle; the importance of the object; and its subserviency to the general scheme of creation. Hence, according to Hume's theory, miracles are equally incredible, whether wrought with or without design, for purposes beneficial or not, and on occasions the most or least deserving. But this surely cannot be a correct statement. On another point, Hume appears equally wanting in argumentative justice; where, in answer to every accumulation of proof, he tells us, that we are not obliged to explain how the story of the evi-

dence arose. Now, I think, we are obliged ; not, perhaps, to show how it did so positively, but how it might so happen, by a probable hypothesis. The existence of the testimony is a phenomenon, which the truth of the fact solves. If we reject this solution, we ought to have some other to rest in ; and none has yet been given, except at variance with human nature and conduct.

But the shortest, if not the strongest proof, of the inconclusiveness of Hume's reasoning, is the following :—

In mathematics, the truth of a theorem is first tried on a simple case : if it fails there, the demonstration must be defective. Let us adopt this plan in the case of Hume's theorem. If twelve honest and sensible men gave a circumstantial account of a miracle, wrought in their presence, and in which they could not be deceived, and if, when questioned about such an account, they had the choice between a confession of the imposture and instant death, they should one and all not only stake their life on their veracity, but actually suffer bodily for conscience sake ; the sceptic does not exist, who, after witnessing such martyrdom, would refuse to believe them, or defend the want of belief, which, according to Hume's theory, every narrative of a miracle must carry with it.

Spurious miracles, supported by apparently strong testimony, no doubt exist. With these Hume has endeavored to fortify his argument. But I hope to show that none of them are really as strong as those in favor of Christianity. In these, however, consists the weight of his objection ; in the principle itself, I am persuaded there is none.

PART I.

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

The two propositions which I shall endeavor to establish are these :

I. That there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of such accounts ; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

II. That there is not satisfactory evidence, that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain as these are, have ever acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of such accounts.

CHAPTER I.

Evidence of the Sufferings of the first Propagators of Christianity, from the Nature of the Case.

To support the first of these propositions, it will be necessary to prove,—1. that Christ and his immediate followers did act the part imputed to them ; and, 2. that they did so, to attest their belief in the history of the miracles and other events recorded in Scripture.

But before we produce particular testimony touching the sufferings of the first Christians, it is proper to

consider the degree of probability derived from the nature of the case, that is, by inferences on points acknowledged by all.

First, then, the Christian religion exists. Now it exists either from the activity of the Founder and his disciples; or we must suppose, that though they were quiet, other persons were active in the propagation of the story. But this is incredible: for had not the Founder been seconded by the activity of his disciples, the attempt must have proved abortive. The exertions and privations of these primitive teachers resembled, doubtless, those of other voluntary missionaries. Preaching, religious converse, retirement from the common pursuits of society, and a devotion to one serious object, compose the habits of such men. I do not say that such a life is joyless, but its enjoyment must spring from sincerity; for, with a consciousness of falsehood, the restraint imposed on hypocrisy would have been too galling to be long endured; and the design, if undertaken at all, would have been soon abandoned through the natural indolence of man.

Secondly, it is probable that Christianity was propagated not without danger. It was a system opposed to the prejudices of the Jews, who had been taught to expect a favorable change in their condition by the birth of an earthly deliverer and ruler.¹ To this hope they clung the more as their calamities increased. To find therefore the downfall of their expectations in the diffusion of a mild and unambitious spiritual kingdom, which, instead of national victories, was to disgrace the Jews, by advancing those whom they despised to an equality with themselves, was a disappointment little favorable to the reception of Christ's novel doctrine, that the kingdom of God was

¹ 'Percrebuerat Oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judæa profecti rerum potirentur.'—Sueton. *Vespas.* 4.

'Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret Oriens, profectique Judæa rerum potirentur.'—Tacit. *Hist.* v. 9.

to be extended to those who did not conform to the law of Moses; an idea that had never entered into the mind of a Jew.

The character of Christianity was ill suited in other respects to Jewish habits and principles.

In their technical religion much stress was laid on the ceremonies of the law; and while the vulgar saw scarcely any virtue out of it, the hypocritical magnified it, as the instrument of their own influence. The Christian scheme, without repealing the Levitical code, lowered its estimation. In the place of outward sanctity and rigid observances, Christianity preached up inward purity and moral rectitude. However rational such conduct may appear now, it was then viewed as a disparagement of the national creed and customs, and raised up powerful enemies accordingly.

The Jewish rulers had just before crucified Christ; and as his followers could not fail to reproach the nation with their unjust murder, such conduct could not fail to render their situation less safe.

With regard to the Roman power then established in Judea, despising, as it did, the Jewish religion, it was little likely to interfere with the schism introduced by Christ. Yet in the misunderstood politics of the new sect a jealous government might easily have found handle for accusation; since the Christians avowed unqualified obedience to their new master, who had been foretold to the Jews under the suspected title of King. But as the spiritual nature of this kingdom, and its consistency with civil subjection, were distinctions too refined for the apprehension of a Roman magistrate, the enemies of Jesus did not fail to take advantage of Pilate's ignorance or fears, and to mix up political with religious tenets; a calumny, of which Justin Martyr,¹ one hundred years afterwards, thus complains:—‘Ye having heard that

¹ Apolog. i. p. 16. ed. Thirlb.

we are waiting for a kingdom, suppose that we mean a human kingdom; when in truth we speak of a heavenly one.

The preachers of Christianity had therefore to contend with prejudice and power; with a disappointed people and a resentful priesthood, and under a foreign government, unfavorable to their pretensions and influenced by their foes. Besides, the constant fate of reformers in their attempt to subvert a deep-rooted religion, prevents us from supposing that the first Christians, surrounded by enemies, and destitute of all but plebeian patronage, could execute their commission without difficulty and danger.

Let us now direct our attention to the heathen public, and inquire whether Christianity presented any peculiarity offensive or not to the prejudices of the Gentiles. Now, in the first place, the religion of Christ is exclusive; and as it denies without reserve every article of a polytheist's creed, and makes no compromise with any object of heathen worship, it must prevail, if it prevail at all, by the overthrow of every idolatrous temple. It is not therefore credible that a design so bold could be carried into execution with impunity.

But it will be said that the polytheism of the ancients was too liberal to take offence at the introduction of any new religion. To this we reply, that Christianity was not so much the erection of a new faith, as the destruction of all established creeds. Other new religions had merely aimed to introduce their favorite deity into the temples of the country; but Christianity aimed to overthrow the altar and the god together: the one, to use a modern phrase, wished to add a saint to the calendar, the other to tread the calendar itself under foot.

Nor, secondly, did the primitive Christians act as the philosophers acted, who, though they questioned, in their schools or writings, the popular belief, or even

avowed their own infidelity, did not go from place to place to collect proselytes amongst the vulgar, or form societies of followers, or establish rules for their conduct and continuance, or enjoin them to renounce the religion of the state, and the rites established by law.¹ But all these things the Christians did, 'and dared the danger of the deed.'

Thirdly, the danger, be it remembered, to which the primitive Christians were exposed, though not brought on them by a state persecution, was not the less imminent from their exposure to the passions of the people and the prejudices of the priests; the rashness of some magistrates, and the negligence of others. Hence, a great deal of ill usage might be endured by a set of friendless travellers, denouncing, wherever they came, the superstition of the people, and exposing as a system of folly and delusion the rites they revered, and the gods they adored.

Nor were the early Christians protected by the general infidelity of the more enlightened pagans. Unbelievers are not usually tolerant; and are certainly ill disposed to create political mischief, by suffering a religion they disbelieve to be disturbed by one they despise. All-conforming themselves, they would make others conformists also; nor will they (why should they?) patronise a change of religion. The younger Pliny, polished by all the literature of that period, must have little understood the true principles of toleration, when pronouncing this monstrous judgment: 'Those who persisted in calling themselves Christians I ordered to be led away to punishment; for I did not doubt that, whatever they confessed, contumacy and obstinacy ought to be punished.' Even his master, the mild Trajan himself, merely ordered the Christians not to be sought for; but if

¹ Plato, Cicero, and Epictetus allowed, or rather enjoined, men to worship the gods of the country in the established form. See the passages collected by Clarke, Nat. and Rev. Rel. p. 180. ed. 5.

convicted, to be punished; and this too, after a judicial report that the Christian was only a bad and excessive superstition, and where the parties were bound by a federal oath to abstain from crime and immorality. The truth is, that amongst the pagans, religion was not merely allied to, but incorporated with the state; and many of its duties were even performed by civil officers, who would consider an affront to religion as treason to government. Besides, the very antiquity of the worship, as Tacitus says of the Jews, was an object of veneration. Add to which, that splendid and elegant in the ornaments of the temples and apparel of the priests, it fascinated its votaries with the charms of painting, sculpture, and architecture, or gladdened their hearts with the music of holiday festivals; while others, through interest, supported a religion which supported them. It was interwoven with every thread of life; and the people were even taught to believe that the downfall of religion would be the ruin of the state.

‘The various modes of worship amongst the ancients,’ says Gibbon, ‘were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by the magistrates as equally useful.’ From which, then, of these three classes could the Christians hope for protection? Not surely from the people, whose religion they decried; nor from the philosopher, who deemed Christianity as false and foolish as other religions; and still less from the magistrate, who, satisfied with things as they were, would discountenance a system which, if it prevailed, would, under the name of reform, produce a revolution, effected by the upstart religion of a company of despicable Jews.

The last proof, connected with inferences drawn from the nature of the case, has regard to the new line of life adopted by the earliest followers of Christ. They, like other teachers of a new religion, doubtless practised what they preached; else they could not have obtained proselytes at all. Of the change neces-

sarily produced by such a novel life, we can form an idea only by considering, that, after men became Christians, their time was spent in religious meetings, in celebrating the Eucharist, in preaching and correspondence with other societies. With men who had passed their time in the busy and luxurious cities of Corinth, Ephesus, Antioch, or even at Jerusalem, what a revolution must have taken place, before all former habits could have been thus thrown off!

We know how pure in thought and how benevolent in act are the precepts of Christianity. Whether the lives of its first teachers were as perfect as their lessons, we know not; but it is fair to presume that their outward behavior at least agreed with the duties they taught. This course of life, then, (and it is all we assert) was new to them; and from the change itself we may infer the strength of the motive that led to what has been called the making 'a new man.'

In the absence, then, of direct information, we might conclude, from the nature of the case, that Christ and his disciples did exert themselves to propagate their religion; that such exertions were attended with danger from their opinions being opposed to the passions and prejudices of the people and rulers; that their visible conduct, at least, corresponded with their doctrine; and that their life, directed to new pursuits, required, what few men are willing to submit to, continued self-denial.

CHAPTER II.

Evidence of the Sufferings of the first Propagators of Christianity, from Profane Testimony.

After this view of what was likely to happen, we are to inquire what history tells us did really happen: and thus, by comparing one with the other, we can best ascertain the credit due to the accounts handed down.

Although but a few passages are to be found in heathen writers, connected with the history of the

Christian religion ; yet, so far as the evidence goes, it is free from cavil. Of these, the nearest in point of time, and therefore deserving the chief attention, is the celebrated quotation from Tacitus, who, speaking of a fire that happened at Rome about thirty years after the death of Christ, says, 'that to do away with the infamous imputation of having ordered the city to be set on fire, Nero laid the guilt of arson on a sect held in abhorrence by the people, and called Christians, whose founder Christ suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked awhile, broke out again in Judea, and spread even to Rome. Some, who confessed their faith, were seized, and, through their informations, many were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning the city, as of hatred to mankind. Some were crucified, and others ordered to be burnt ; so that, when day closed, they might serve for night lamps.'¹

From this passage, highly valuable as evidence in behalf of the primitive Christians, we prove, 1. that Christ was put to death ; 2. that, after his death, Christianity so spread, as even to reach Rome in the short space of thirty-four years ; and, 3. that a great number of converts were to be found there : and we thence infer, 1. that the original teachers could not have been idle in their endeavors to propagate the religion ; and, 2. that when Christ himself was put to death, such propagation could not be free from danger.

Suetonius, a writer contemporary with Tacitus, describing the events of the same reign, says, that, 'the Christians, a set of men with a new and mischievous (or magical) superstition, were punished.'² But as no mention is here made of such punishments being inflicted under the pretence of the Christians having burnt the city, it is fair to infer that Suetonius

¹ Annal. xv. 44.

² Nero, 16.

alludes to a more general persecution than the one described by Tacitus.

Juvenal too, a writer of the same age, alluding to the cruelties exercised by Nero, thus expresses himself: 'Describe Tigellinus (a creature of Nero); and you shall shed a light in that torch, where men blaze standing, and with necks fixed smoke.'¹

But though this passage would by itself prove nothing, yet, when coupled with the testimony of Suetonius touching the actual punishment of the Christians, and with the words of Tacitus, respecting the kind of torture they were made to undergo, it is probable that all the three writers refer to the same description of persons.

Now, as this persecution took place within thirty-one years after Christ's death, it must have happened, if not in the life-time of the first apostles, at least in that of their converts. Hence, if Christ himself suffered death, and the converts of the apostles were persecuted also, it seems incredible that the apostles themselves, or their contemporary converts, should be able to propagate the religion with ease and safety.

The testimony of the younger Pliny belongs to a later period. His letter to Trajan² was written about seventy years after the death of Christ; and it goes to prove, 1. that, as the number of Christians in Bithynia and Pontus was very considerable, great exertions must have been previously made to propagate Christianity; and, 2. that the sufferings to which the Christians were exposed, was not the result of any state persecution. For from the very terms of Pliny's inquiry respecting the manner how the Christians were

¹ Sat. i. 155.

² Epist. x. 25. His words are, 'Multi omnis ætatis, utriusque sexus etiam;—neque enim civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam et agros, superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est.' 'There are many of every age, and of both sexes;—nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but smaller towns also, and the open country.'

to be treated, it is plain that no public edict was then in force against them; while from the same letter it appears, that 'in the provinces many had been put on their trial, and some had even died, boldly owning their faith; while others had been frightened into a recantation.' All which plainly proves that the profession of Christianity was at that time and place attended with danger, not only without the persecution of the state, but even in violation of the law, as appears from the rescript of Adrian to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia; whom the emperor enjoins for the future to bring the Christians to trial, and not to put them down by clamor.

Martial also, who wrote a few years before the younger Pliny, has made the sufferings of the Christians a subject of ridicule in an epigram (x. 20.)¹ which, while it proves the notoriety of the fact, proves also that the deaths of these men were martyrdoms; since they might, by recanting, have escaped punishment entirely.

Epictetus, (iv. 7.) too, attributes the constancy of the Galileans under sufferings, to madness or fashion; while Marcus Aurelius (xi. 3.) bids the mind to be prepared for death from reason, and not, like the Christians, from obstinacy.

CHAPTER III.

Indirect Evidence of the Sufferings of the first Propagators of Christianity, from the Scriptures and other ancient Christian Writings.

Of the primitive state of Christianity heathen writers give but a distant view: its history in detail must

¹ In matutina nuper spectatus arena
Mucius, imposuit qui sua membra focis,
Si patiens fortisque tibi durusque videtur,
Abderitanæ pectora plebis habes;
Nam cum dicatur, tunica præsentem molesta,
Ure manum: plus est dicere, Non facio.

be sought for, where alone it ought to be found, in the sacred writings; since none but a Christian either would or even could offer a faithful record of events. Amongst these records we find four histories of Jesus Christ, followed by a narrative of events that took place after his death, during the propagation of the religion, for a space of nearly thirty years. We have also a collection of letters written by the principal agents in the propagation, all testifying to the sufferings of the primitive Christians, by nearly every conceivable kind of evidence, direct and indirect; and by such variety (especially as regards facts casually or undesignedly disclosed) exhibiting proofs the least liable to be corrupted or misrepresented. For instance :—

1. The sacred writers tell us that the Founder of Christianity was, on account of his religion, put to death at Jerusalem; and so says Tacitus. Again, from the New Testament we learn, that this religion, notwithstanding, was propagated throughout Judea and other parts of the Roman empire; and so says Tacitus. Now, from these facts it may be fairly inferred, that the disciples of Christ neither did nor could hope to escape free from danger, when they saw their master lose his life; for, as the Jews had persecuted the one, common sense would tell them that they would persecute the others also.

2. All the histories agree in representing Christ as foretelling the persecution of his followers, as appears from Matth. xxiv. 9. Mark iv. 17. x. 29. Luke xi. 49. xxi. 12. John xvi. 4. xv. 20. xvi. 33.

Now, though we are not entitled to assert that Christ did foretell these events as they came to pass, (for that would be to assume the truth of the religion) we may fairly contend, either that Christ did really foretell the event before it happened, or that the prediction has been put into his mouth after the event.

3. The sacred books abound with exhortations to patience, and with grounds of comfort under distress,

as in Rom. v. 3. viii. 35. 2 Cor. iv. 81—7. 2 Thes. i. 4. Heb. x. 32. James v. 10. 1 Pet. iv. 12—19.

Now what could such texts mean, if the primitive Christians did not really suffer? Or will it be pretended that these exhortations were interpolated in various places, to prove in after ages that the early Christians had been exposed to difficulties and dangers? But this supposition cannot be maintained for a moment, since the books, whether genuine or spurious, as regards the writers, certainly belong to the age to which they lay claim; and, consequently, the persons into whose hands they fell would have been able to detect such interpolations, as being at variance with the facts. Had the works been of a different and a more recent date, such interpolations might, perhaps, have been introduced from such motives without the risk of detection; but in no other case could even the attempt have been made.

CHAPTER IV.

Direct Evidence of the Sufferings of the first Propagators of Christianity, from the Scriptures and other ancient Christian Writings.

The following account is furnished by the Scriptures, not continuously, but dispersedly, as occasions present themselves for the narration of different events; and is therefore free from the suspicion of fraud, which a more connected history might give rise to, relative to the reception of the religion, and the sufferings of its first propagators; viz.—

That the Founder of Christianity, from his first appearance to his death, confined the propagation of his doctrine to Judea and Galilee; that to assist in his ministry he chose twelve of his followers; that, with the exception of a short period, when they were sent in pairs to preach in the country, the twelve apostles accompanied him from place to place; that, having

Paley Evid.

B

been with him at the time of his death, they were, after his resurrection, commissioned to go into all lands, and preach the glad tidings to future converts; that after his ascension they chose one of his followers,¹ who, like the rest, had been a witness of the principal events of the early Christian history, to supply the place of one of the original twelve apostles, who, after betraying his master, had committed suicide; that these twelve apostles publicly asserted that their master, Jesus, whom the Jews had lately crucified, was the person foretold by their national prophets as the future King of the Jews; that he had been appointed by God to visit the earth as a man, and was to appear as the judge of man hereafter; that all who wished to secure eternal happiness after death must acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, and be baptised in his name;² that many were so baptised; and having formed themselves into a society,³ two of the twelve apostles were seized, while preaching in the temple, and after undergoing a night's imprisonment, were brought before the Jewish magistracy, by whom, however, they were liberated, on pain of future punishment if they persisted in preaching; that, nothing daunted by such threats, not only they, but other members of the society entered into a general resolution to persevere, trusting in God to inspire them with fortitude to bear all things for Jesus' sake;⁴ that, shortly afterwards, the whole twelve apostles were seized, imprisoned, and beaten, for their obstinate violation of the Jewish ordinance;⁵ that, after being charged again to desist, they were liberated; and, lastly, that so far from quitting Jerusalem, they never ceased preaching in public and in private,⁶ and, devoting themselves to the spiritual interests of the society, transferred its temporal affairs into other hands.⁷

¹ Acts i. 21.² Acts xi.³ Acts iv. 32.

Acts iv.

⁴ Acts v. 18.⁵ Acts v. 42.

Although it is no where insinuated, that the Christian mission was a scheme for making money, it may be fit to remark, how

Hitherto the preachers of the new religion, supported by the people, prevented, it would seem, the Jewish rulers from proceeding to greater extremities. But in a little time the people's prejudices were so excited against the Christians, as persons who were degrading their national law-giver, and dishonoring their temple,¹ that they joined with their superiors in stoning an active member of the new faith.

The death of this person was the signal of a persecution so general, as to drive nearly all the converts out of the city;² but who, thus scattered abroad, advanced the religion only the more, by preaching wherever they came; though they still kept up such a correspondence with the twelve apostles, who remained at Jerusalem, that when these last heard of the success of their emissaries, they sent two of their number to confirm the mission.

The persecution, begun at Jerusalem, followed the Christians to other places under the control of the Jewish Sanhedrim; and a young man,³ who had signalled himself for his hostility to the new faith, and had procured a commission to seize any converted Jew he might find at Damascus, became suddenly a convert himself; and, by such conversion, made himself so obnoxious to the party whose religion he had

perfectly free the apostles appear to have been from such pecuniary views. The most tempting opportunity which occurred, of making a gain of their converts, was by the custody and management of the public funds, when some of the richer members, intending to contribute their fortunes to the society, sold their possessions, and laid down the prices at the apostles' feet. Yet, so indifferent were they to the advantage which that confidence afforded, that they soon disposed of the trust, by putting it into the hands of stewards, elected for the purpose by the society at large.

We may add also, that this generosity on the part of the rich, was so far from being required by the apostles, or imposed as a law of Christianity, that Peter reminds Ananias that he had been guilty of a voluntary prevarication; 'for whilst (says he) thy estate remained unsold, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?'

¹ Acts vi. 12.

² Acts viii. 1.

³ Acts ix.

deserted, that, on his return to Damascus, he with difficulty escaped the hands of the exasperated Jews; and, as he found himself in no greater security at Jerusalem, whither he had repaired, he was compelled to be sent away to Cilicia, his native country.

For some reason not known, and with difficulty guessed at, the Christians, for a few years, (eight at most) ceased to be persecuted;¹ and thus were able, during an interval of peace, to form ecclesiastical societies in the country of the Jews;² and such was their activity, that one of their principal preachers passed through all quarters; while they, who had been expelled from Jerusalem, reached as far as Phœnice, Cyprus, and Antioch;³ and, lastly, we find the missionaries returning to Jerusalem, as their head-quarters, with reports of their different excursions, and with requests for the settlement of questions, touching the articles of their common faith.

This tranquillity, however, did not long continue. Herod Agrippa, the governor of Judea, recommenced a persecution against the church, by beheading a kinsman of the founder of the religion;⁴ and, to gratify the Jews still further, he seized, with a view to put to death, another of the society, formerly a companion of Christ, and, since his death, eminently active in propagating the religion; but who, miraculously delivered from prison, made his escape from Jerusalem.

The history, whose outlines are here given, is told, not in general terms, but with the utmost particularity of persons, places, and circumstances, and without the least desire to magnify or conceal facts. The deeds and sufferings of the primitive Christians are related,

¹ Lardner (in which he is followed also by Benson) ascribes this cessation of the persecution of the Christians to the attempt of Caligula to set up his own statue in the temple of Jerusalem, and to the consternation thereby excited in the minds of the Jewish people; which consternation for a season suspended every other contest.

² Acts ix. 31.

³ Acts xi. 19.

⁴ Acts xii. 1.

not as a tale to amuse, but as a truth to be remembered; and as, in the narration of lighter persecutions, the writers appear to be trustworthy, from the absence of all exaggeration, they ought to be considered no less so, when truth required them to speak of greater sufferings and actual martyrdoms.

Leaving the rest of the apostles engaged, no doubt, in the propagation of the religion, the sacred history proceeds with the separate memoirs of the Cilician convert to Christianity. This person, associated with one of the immediate adherents¹ of the twelve apostles; set out from Antioch to carry the new religion into Asia Minor,² exposed, wherever the two came, not only to insults, but even to such danger of their lives, that at Lystra³ one of them, after being stoned, was carried out of the city for dead.

But though these persons were not the original apostles, they so acted in connexion with them, that when they went to Jerusalem on a special commission, they related the events of their mission, and were, in return, recommended to the societies of Christians, as men who had hazarded their lives in the cause.

Strengthened thus by the approbation of the apostles, and undeterred by the difficulties of their first journey, they prepared for a second. But, a dispute arising between them on a point unconnected with their common faith, they parted from each other, and, equally sincere in their determination to advance Christianity, took different routes.

Of the travels of the less celebrated disciple we know next to nothing. The sacred history narrates the adventures of the other alone, whose second enterprise was, like the first, attended with many dangers.

After crossing the *Ægean* sea, in company with the writer of their joint travels,⁴ he stopped at Philippi,

¹ Acts iv. 36.

² Acts xiii. 2.

³ Acts xiv. 19.

⁴ Acts xvi. 11.

in Macedonia, where himself and one of his companions were whipped, imprisoned, and thrust into the stocks,¹ even while smarting with their wounds; still, nothing daunted by such usage, they proceeded on their errand; and passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where the house in which they lodged was assailed by their enemies, and its owner taken before the magistrate for admitting them within his doors.² Their reception at the next city was, at first, more favorable; but, ere long, the Jews so played on the prejudices of the people, that the apostle was compelled to escape privately to Athens. From thence he went to Corinth, where he continued unmolested, till the Jews again stirred up the populace against him, and brought him before the tribunal of the Roman president, by whom he was set at liberty, from the contempt which the governor felt for the Jews and their schisms, of which he believed Christianity to be one.³

After leaving Corinth, the apostle returned to Jerusalem, the head-quarters of the Christian fraternity; and after a short stay he went to Antioch, and traversed again the northern provinces of Asia Minor, until he arrived at Ephesus, where he settled quietly for two years in the daily exercise of his ministry. At last, he excited the ill will of the friends of the national religion, and nearly lost his life in the tumult raised by them.⁴

Driven at length from Ephesus, he, nothing dismayed, passed over to Macedonia, and returned to Corinth; from whence he again departed, and after many difficulties reached Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost. But he had been only a few days in the city, when some of his old Jewish enemies, who had left Asia and come to Jerusalem to attend the same

¹ Acts xvi. 23—33.

² Acts xviii. 12.

³ Acts xvii. 1.

⁴ Acts xix. 24.

feast, seized him in the temple, and would have destroyed him, had he not been rescued by the Roman guard. But though his life was thus saved, he was kept in prison, and even threatened with the question by torture; till at length, after escaping assassination through the fortunate discovery of the plot, he made an appeal to the emperor at Rome; and in consequence was sent to Italy, where, after a tedious voyage, and the perils of shipwreck,¹ he arrived safe. In the midst, however, of all his sufferings, he still persisted in preaching his religion; and during the two years, when he lodged in his own hired house, under the surveillance of a guard, he received all who wished to hear of those things which relate to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of so much of the preceding history as relates to the adventures of St. Paul, narrated by Luke, we have the strongest possible corroboration in the Epistles of St. Paul himself, written during the very period which the history comprises; or, if written afterwards, referring to the transactions of that period; and while the letters neither borrow from the history, nor the history from the letters, in both are found similar accounts of, or rather allusions to, the same dangers and difficulties of the primitive Christians; the point which, in this stage of the inquiry, we are most anxious to insist on. Thus, for instance, what is related by St. Luke, in Acts xx. 34. of St. Paul supplying his own necessities, and those of his companions, by his personal labor, is confirmed by St. Paul in his Epistle, 1 Cor. iv. 11. asserting of himself, that even to that hour he labored, working with his own hands.

Other coincidences may be seen, by comparing

Acts xvi. 23. with 1 Thess. ii. 2.

— xvii. 5. ————— i. 6.

¹ Acts xxvii.

Acts xix. 24. with 2 Cor. i. 8.

— xiii. 50. }
— xiv. 5. } — 2 Tim. iii. 10.

and from all these, and many others equally satisfactory, the truth of the Scripture history is confirmed, first, in single points, and then as a whole, by the light thrown mutually on each other by the writers of the narrative and letters respectively, and by both together on the general story; while a still further corroboration of the preceding testimony to the sufferings of the primitive Christians is found in the writings which remain of the immediate companions and followers of the apostles.

1. Clement, who is mentioned by Saint Paul, in Philipp. iv. 3. says, 'Let us take the examples of our own age. Through zeal and envy, the most faithful and righteous pillars of the church have been persecuted even to the most grievous deaths. Let us set before our eyes the holy apostles. Peter, by unjust envy, underwent not one or two, but many sufferings; till at last, being martyred, he went to the place of glory that was due unto him. For the same cause did Paul, in like manner, receive the reward of his patience. Seven times he was in bonds; he was whipped, was stoned; he preached both in the east and in the west, leaving behind him the glorious report of his faith; and so having taught the whole world righteousness, and for that end travelled even unto the utmost bounds of the west, he at last suffered martyrdom by the command of the governors, and departed out of the world, and went unto his holy place, being become a most eminent pattern of patience unto all ages. To these holy apostles were joined a very great number of others, who, having through envy undergone, in like manner, many pains and torments, have left a glorious example to us. For this, not only men, but women, have been persecuted; and, having

suffered very grievous and cruel punishments, have finished the course of their faith with firmness.’¹

2. *Hermas*, saluted by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, in a piece very little connected with historical recitals, thus speaks: ‘Such as have believed and suffered death for the name of Christ, and have endured with a ready mind, and have given up their lives with all their hearts.’²

3. Polycarp, the disciple of John (though all that remains of his works be a very short epistle), has not left this subject unnoticed. ‘I exhort (says he) all of you, that ye obey the word of righteousness, and exercise all patience, which ye have seen set forth before your eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius, and Lorimus, and Rufus, but in others among yourselves, and in Paul himself and the rest of the apostles, being confident in this, that all these have not run in vain, but in faith and righteousness; and are gone to the place that was due to them from the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they loved not this present world, but Him who died, and was raised again by God for us.’³

4. Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, recognises the same topic, briefly indeed, but positively and precisely. ‘For this cause (i. e. having felt and handled Christ’s body after his resurrection, and being convinced, as Ignatius expresses it, both by his flesh and spirit), they (i. e. Peter, and those who were present with Peter at Christ’s appearance) despised death, and were found to be above it.’⁴

Would the reader know what a persecution in these days was, I would refer him to a circular letter, written by the church of Smyrna soon after the death of

¹ Clem. ad Cor. v. vi. in Wake’s Translation.

² Shepherd of Hermas, c. xxviii.

³ Pol. ad Phil. c. ix.

⁴ Ep. Smyr. 19. c. iii.

Polycarp, who, it will be remembered, had lived with Saint John; and which letter is entitled a relation of that bishop's martyrdom. 'The sufferings (say they) of all the other martyrs were blessed and generous, which they underwent according to the will of God. For so it became us, who are more religious than others, to ascribe the power and ordering of all things unto him. And indeed who can choose but admire the greatness of their minds, and that admirable patience and love of their Master, which then appeared in them? Who, when they were so flayed with whipping, that the frame and structure of their bodies were laid open to their very inward veins and arteries, nevertheless endured it. In like manner, those who were condemned to the beasts, and kept a long time in prison, underwent many cruel torments, being forced to lie on sharp spikes laid under their bodies, and tormented with divers other sorts of punishments; that so, if it were possible, the tyrant, by the length of their sufferings, might have brought them to deny Christ.'¹

CHAPTER V.

Observations on the preceding Evidence.

On the preceding abstract of the history of primitive Christianity, it is necessary to observe,

1. That though the narrative of the doings and sufferings of Christ and his immediate disciples generally, is followed by the narrative of the doings and sufferings of a particular apostle, yet the latter shows, like the former, the nature of the service: for if one was persecuted, it is fair to infer the others would be persecuted also; an inference borne out by the fact, that St. Paul alludes distinctly² to the sufferings of other

¹ Rel. Mor. Pol. c. ii.

² 1 Cor. iv. 9.

apostles : besides, we find that, within ten years after the death of Christ, first two and then all were imprisoned ;¹ one stoned to death, one beheaded, and another sentenced to the same fate.

II. That, though we do not now insist on the truth of the history either wholly or in part, still, unless the whole be a fiction, the persons mentioned imaginary, and their letters forgeries of names and circumstances that never existed, there is evidence sufficient to prove that Christ and his followers did propagate their religion, and suffer solely for such propagation.

III. That the general truth of the apostolic history is confirmed by the fact of its assigning adequate causes for effects which were in reality produced, and describing consequences naturally resulting from situations which did certainly exist. We know from other testimony than of the Christians themselves, that the religion began to prevail at the time and place which the Scriptures assert ; but how it could prevail at all without the exertions of its founder and his followers, we can scarcely conceive. Now as the history of Christianity distinctly narrates these exertions, it assigns effects to adequate causes. Again, as the new religion was adverse to the prejudices of the people amongst whom it was first introduced, and calculated, wherever it took root, to overthrow the national worship, it is reasonable to believe that the propagators of such a system would meet with opposition, proceeding in some cases to fatal extremities. Now as such opposition and extreme sufferings are detailed in the Scripture History, credit is fairly due to it, from its describing consequences naturally resulting from the situation into which the actors were thrown.

¹ Acts iv. 3. and v. 18.

IV. That the Scripture records prove, what has been asserted above as highly probable, that the primitive Christians assumed, on their conversion, a new course of life; 1. by frequent praying together;¹ 2. by repenting of their former sins, and refraining from acts not previously thought to be criminal; and, 3. by exhibiting a change in their manners, in conformity to the rules of purity and benevolence, prescribed as the peculiar distinction of the new faith by the Christian teachers, for which see Ephes. ii. 1. Tit. iii. 3. 1 Cor. vi. 11. Rom. vi. 21. and 1 Pet. iv. 3. Besides, the phrases which the same writer employs to describe the moral condition of Christians, compared with their condition before they became Christians, such as 'newness of life,' being 'freed from sin,' being 'dead to sin;' 'the destruction of the body of sin, that, for the future, they should not serve sin;' 'children of light, and of the day,' as opposed to 'children of darkness, and of the night;' 'not sleeping as others;' imply, at least, a new system of obligation, and, probably, a new series of conduct, commencing with their conversion.

The inference deduced from the preceding passages, relative to the change for the better in the moral conduct of the early Christian converts, is confirmed by Pliny, who lived within fifty years after the time of St. Paul. His words are, 'That some of those who had relinquished the society, or who, to save themselves, pretended that they had relinquished it, affirmed that they were wont to meet together, on a stated day, before it was light, and sang among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ, as a God; and to bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but that they would not be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; that they would never falsify their word, or deny a pledge committed to them, when called on to return it.'

¹ Acts i. 14. and ii. 46.

Now, as this testimony proves that the Christians of that period practised a morality more strict than ordinary, it is fair to carry back the inference to be deduced from that testimony to the age of the apostles; since it is hard to believe that the immediate disciples of Christ were less moral than the converts in the time of Pliny.

CHAPTER VI.

That the Story, for which the first Propagators of Christianity suffered, was miraculous.

In the preceding chapters we have shown, 1. that Christianity exists; 2. that its existence must be owing to the activity of its first propagators; 3. that such activity was exposed to danger and difficulty; 4. that both sacred and profane history bear witness to the fate of the founder of the religion; 5. that the same testimonies coincide in acknowledging the sufferings of the primitive Christians; 6. that such sufferings were either predicted by Christ, or put into his mouth, as predictions, after the event; 7. that letters now exist, written by persons so suffering, and detailing their sufferings; 8. that a narrative also exists, written by a fellow-traveller of the author of the letters, both mutually confirming each other's accounts, though not borrowed the one from the other; 9. that, in the narrative alluded to, are found such accounts of sufferings as might reasonably be expected to result from the situations of the parties concerned in the propagation of a new religion; and, lastly, that the teachers and converts preached and practised a course of life new and peculiar, in proof of their belief in the truth of such religion.

If, then, we have stated fairly the preceding facts, it is plain that a number of persons did once appear, publicly advancing an extraordinary story; and, for the sake of propagating it, not only exposing themselves

to dangers, but submitting themselves to rules of conduct alien to all their former habits.

From the clear and acknowledged parts of the case, it is highly probable that the extraordinary story, for the propagation of which the parties underwent such sufferings, was a story presenting miraculous events; for, had it been otherwise, the religion could have had nothing to stand on. That Jesus was the Messiah, and, as such, the subject of their ministry, could be proved only by supernatural tokens; for none could they give of a natural kind. That a Galilean peasant, announced as a divine lawgiver, was the predicted deliverer of the Jews, whom, so far from delivering, he left in slavery as great as when he first appeared, was a tale too absurd to be even invented by one party, much less credited by the other. There was, therefore, nothing but miracles to show that the carpenter's son was the Messiah. Every controversy respecting the truth of the new doctrine must presuppose thus much; for however such controversies might be discussed on their own grounds, without any immediate reference to the miracles, yet without presupposing their existence, there could have been no discussion at all. For instance, whether the prophecies relating to the Messiah were or not applicable to Jesus of Nazareth, would be a natural subject of debate in those times; but the very question must of necessity exhibit, though not at every turn, the belief, on the part of both disputants, that the real Messiah would, when he appeared, as predicted, give proofs of himself such as a falsely called Messiah could not give. Apollos mightily convinced the Jews, by showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.¹ But unless Jesus had given proofs of supernatural power, the arguments from the Old Testament could have proved nothing; especially when, after the death of Christ,

¹ Acts xviii. 28.

the Jews found that, if the prophecies had terminated in the person of Jesus, their expectations of deliverance, excited by those very prophecies, had not been verified at all.

That the original story was miraculous may be inferred likewise from the fact, that the Christians of succeeding ages laid claim to miraculous powers also. If the accounts of the first miracles were true, the others were a continuation of the same miraculous powers; if false, an imitation, not of what was, but of what was said to have been done. Now, that miracles performed by some, should be pretended to be done by others, agrees so well with the common course of human affairs, that we believe at once in the imitation thus following the reality; but that miracles should be pretended to have been done by the disciples, when their master himself had not pretended to do any, is an event too improbable to be for a moment admitted.

CHAPTER VII.

That it was, in the main, the Story which we have now, proved by indirect Considerations.

Having thus shown that the primitive Christians did suffer for their propagation of a miraculous story, the next inquiry is, whether that story be the one which we find in the New Testament.

That the story which Christians have now is the story which Christians had then, may be proved by considering—

1. That there exists no trace of any other story. It is not, like the death of Cyrus the Great, a competition between the credit of two different historians. There is not a document, or scrap of one, of the same age as the Scripture history, which is substantially different from the records we possess. The remote and incidental notices of the events found in heathen writers; so far as they do go, go along with us; and testify that Jesus, the founder of the new faith, was

put to death as a malefactor at Jerusalem; that the religion nevertheless spread even into distant countries; that the converts were numerous; that they were persecuted for their faith; and that all this was done in the age assigned to them in the New Testament. They go on to describe the manners of Christians, in terms conformable to the accounts extant in our books; that they were wont to assemble on a certain day; that they sang hymns to Christ as to a God; that they bound themselves by an oath not to commit any crime, but to abstain from theft and adultery, to adhere strictly to their promises, and not to deny money deposited in their hands; that they worshipped him who was crucified in Palestine; that this lawgiver had taught them that they were all brethren; that they had a great contempt for things of this world, and looked on them as common; that they flew to one another's relief; that they cherished strong hopes of immortality; that they despised death, and surrendered themselves to sufferings.

This is the account of writers, who viewed the subject at a distance, and, uninterested about it, describe merely the effects that resulted from the appearance of a new religion and the conversion of the multitude, without descending to the details of the transaction or troubling themselves about the evidence by which the religion was established. But in such discrepancies of narration there is not only no contradiction to the story in the New Testament, but a confirmation rather on points of a more general kind.

In like manner, the Jewish writers of that or the adjoining period, though they omit some circumstances, allude to no other story than the one still extant.

Josephus, who wrote his *Antiquities* about sixty years after the birth of Christ, mentions John the Baptist by name, as a preacher of virtue;¹ that he baptised his proselytes; and though well received by

¹ *Antiq.* xviii. 5. 1.

the people, was put to death by Herod, who cohabited with Herodias, his brother's wife; and in another passage, contested by some though allowed by many, he speaks of James, the brother of him who was called Jesus, and of his being put to death;¹ and in a third passage, the authenticity of which has been long disputed, he thus testifies to the substance of our history:—‘At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man, for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the cross, they, who before had conceived an affection for him, did not cease to adhere to him: for, on the third day, he appeared to them alive again; the divine prophets having foretold these and many wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of the Christians, so called from him, subsists to this time.’²

Now, whether the passage be genuine or not, still, as far as we can learn from Josephus, the story existing in his time did not differ from the one we have now. But that the passage is genuine, or, if not, that Josephus designedly omitted all mention of Christ, may be inferred from considering, that, if Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny, all of whom wrote within thirty years after the time of Josephus, speak of Christ and the acts of his followers, it cannot be believed that the religion, and the transactions on which it was founded, diffused, as they were, through nearly all the Roman empire in the east, were so obscure as to be unknown to Josephus, or so trifling as not to deserve a place in his pages; unless it be said that not knowing how to dispose of the business, he passed it over in silence; just as Eusebius, for the same rea-

¹ Antiq. xx. 9. 1.

² Antiq. xviii. 3. 2.

son, omits the most remarkable circumstance in the life of Constantine, viz. the death of his son Crispus; and even as Josephus himself has done in passing over the banishment of the Jews by Claudius, which Suetonius has recorded; and his no less remarkable silence about the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem.¹

But be the cause of the omission² in Josephus what it may, he neither gives, nor is pretended to have given, a story different to the one we possess; and the same may be observed of the whole series of Christian writers from the first century down to the present. The main facts and the principal agents are the same in all. This argument will appear to be of great force, when we are able to trace upwards the series of these writers to the age of the first emissaries of the religion, and downwards from their time to the present.

The remaining letters of the apostles, (and what more original than their letters can we have?) though written without the remotest design of transmitting the history of Christ, or of Christianity, to future ages, or even of making it known to their contemporaries, incidentally disclose to us the following circumstances:—Christ's descent and family; the meekness and gentleness of his character; his exalted nature; his cir-

¹ Michaelis has computed, and, perhaps, fairly enough, that not more than twenty children perished by this cruel precaution. See his Introduction to the New Testament, translated by Marsh, i. ii. 11.

² There is no notice taken of Christianity in the Misna, a collection of Jewish traditions compiled about the year 180; although it contains a tract 'De cultu peregrino,' Of strange or idolatrous worship: yet it cannot be disputed but that Christianity was perfectly well known in the world at this time. There is little notice of the subject in the Jerusalem Talmud, compiled about the year 300, and not much more in the Babylonish Talmud, of the year 500; although both these works are of a religious nature, and although, when the first was compiled, Christianity was on the point of becoming the religion of the state, and, when the latter was published, had been so for 200 years.

cumcision ; his transfiguration ; his resignation under suffering ; the appointment of the Eucharist, and the manner of it ; his agony ; his confession before Pontius Pilate ; his stripes, crucifixion, and burial ; his resurrection ; his appearance after it, first to Peter, then to the rest of the apostles ; his ascension into heaven ; and his designation to be the future judge of mankind ;—the stated residence of the apostles at Jerusalem ; the working of miracles by the first preachers of the Gospel, who were also the hearers of Christ ;¹ the successful propagation of the religion ; the persecution of its followers ; the miraculous conversion of Paul ; miracles wrought by himself, and alleged in his controversies with his adversaries, and in letters to the persons amongst whom they were wrought ; finally, that miracles were the signs of an apostle.²

In an epistle bearing the name of Barnabas, the companion of Paul, probably genuine, certainly belonging to that age, we have the sufferings of Christ ; his choice of apostles and their number ; his passion, the scarlet robe, the vinegar and gall, the mocking and piercing, the casting lots for his coat,³ his resurrection on the eighth (i. e. the first) day of the week,⁴ and the commemorative distinction of that day, his manifestation after his resurrection, and, lastly, his ascen-

¹ Heb. ii. 3. 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost ?' 'I allege this Epistle without hesitation ; for, whatever doubts may have been raised about its author, there can be none concerning the age in which it was written. No epistle in the collection carries about it more indubitable marks of antiquity than this does. It speaks, for instance, throughout, of the temple as then standing, and of the worship of the temple as then subsisting.—Heb. viii. 4. 'For, if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing there are priests that offer according to the law.' Again, Heb. xiii. 10. 'We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat, who serve the tabernacle.'

² 2 Cor. xii. 12.

³ Ep. Bar. c. vii.

⁴ Ibid. c. vi.

sion. We have also his miracles generally, yet positively referred to in the following words: 'Finally, teaching the people of Israel, and doing many wonders and signs among them, he preached to them, and showed the exceeding great love which he bare towards them.'¹

In an epistle of Clement, a hearer of St. Paul, although written for a purpose remotely connected with the Christian history, we have the resurrection of Christ, and the subsequent mission of the apostles, recorded in these satisfactory terms: 'The apostles have preached to us from our Lord Jesus Christ from God:—for, having received their command, and being thoroughly assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, they went abroad, publishing that the kingdom of God was at hand.'² We find noticed also the humility, yet the power of Christ,³ his descent from Abraham, and his crucifixion. We have Peter and Paul represented as righteous pillars of the church; the numerous sufferings of Peter; the bonds, stripes, and stoning of Paul, and, more particularly, his extensive and unwearied travels.

In an epistle of Polycarp, a disciple of St. John, though only a brief hortatory letter, we have the humility, patience, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension, of Christ, together with the apostolic character of St. Paul, distinctly recognised.⁴ Of this same father we are also assured by Irenæus, that he (Irenæus) had heard him relate 'what he had received from eye-witnesses concerning the Lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrine.'

In the remaining works of Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, (yet, like those of Polycarp, treating of subjects in no wise leading to any recital of the Christian history) the occasional allusions are more

¹ Ep. Bar. c. v.

² Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xlii.

³ Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xvi.

⁴ Pol. Ep. ad Phil. c. v. viii. ii. iii.

numerous. The descent of Christ from David, his mother Mary, his miraculous conception, the star at his birth, his baptism by John, the reason assigned for it, his appeal to the prophets, the ointment poured on his head, his sufferings under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, his resurrection, the Lord's day called and kept in commemoration of it, and the Eucharist, in both its parts—are unequivocally referred to. On the resurrection, this writer is even circumstantial. He mentions the apostles' eating and drinking with Christ after he had risen, their feeling and their handling him; from which last circumstance Ignatius raises this just reflection:—'They believed, being convinced both by his flesh and his spirit: for this cause, they despised death, and were found to be above it.'¹

Quadratus, of the same age with Ignatius, has left us the following noble testimony:—'The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both those that were healed, and those that were raised from the dead; who were seen not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterward; not only whilst he dwelled on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a good while after it, insomuch that some of them have reached to our times.'²

Justin Martyr came little more than thirty years after Quadratus. From Justin's works, which are still extant, might be collected a tolerably complete account of Christ's life, taken indeed, in a great measure, from the New Testament, but still proving that this account, and no other, was known in that age. The miracles in particular, which form the part of Christ's history most material to be traced, are distinctly recognised in the following passage:—'He healed those who had been blind, and deaf, and lame,

¹ Ad Smyr. c. iii.

² Ap. Euseb. H. E. lib. iv. c. iii.

from their birth; causing, by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to see: and by raising the dead, and making them to live, he induced, by his works, the men of that age to know him.¹

It is unnecessary to carry these citations lower, because the history, after this time, occurs in ancient Christian writings always the same in substance as that which our evangelists represent.

The same observation applies to all the writings of the Christians whether genuine or not; and even where fables are mixed up with the narrative, they preserve the leading facts as we have them, and so far afford evidence that these points were fixed and acknowledged by all Christians, who lived in the age when the books were written.

If, therefore, the story we now possess be not the original story, we must suppose, 1. that the original story has died away so entirely as to leave no record of its existence; and, 2. that another story has stepped into its place, and gained the exclusive belief of the earlier disciples; suppositions inconsistent with the experience of written history; and, even if true, presenting such a change in the oblivion of one story, and the substitution of another, as no similar example of the corruption of even oral tradition can render probable. But in fact no such change has taken place. The Christian story is now what it ever was in the main points, although interpolations, not difficult to detect, may have been introduced, and doctrinal errors, arising from such interpolations, grafted into public creeds.

III. The religious rites of the primitive Christians were so connected with the history of the religion, as to show that the narrative now extant is similar to the one which was the ground of their faith and acts.

¹ Just. Dial. cum Tryph. p. 238. ed. Thirl.

Thus we know from other sources that the first Christians were baptised, held religious assemblies on stated days of the week, and celebrated the Eucharist; all which rites, in the New Testament, are required to be done by converts to Christianity; and, what is more, the same rites prevailed then as now amongst societies of Christians of different ages and distant climes. Nor is there the least room for insinuating that the authors, finding the usages established, framed the story to suit the customs; for the Scripture accounts, especially of the Lord's supper, are too cursory, not to say obscure, to allow any place for such a suspicion.¹

IV. The last proof of our assertion, that the story we now have is in substance what has been from the first, rests on the argument, that the story was, previous to the publication of the Gospels, already made public; and thus the Gospels were not the cause, but the consequence of the belief of the earliest Christians. This is expressly affirmed by St. Luke, in the preface to his narrative; while an inference, bearing on the same point, may be deduced from the narrative of St. John, who refers to a fact which he does not relate himself; as in the case of the ascension, which, omitted at the close of the history, is referred to in the words of the 6th chapter, 'What if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?' and still more positively in the words, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father.'² This can only be accounted for on the sup-

¹ The intelligent reader, by comparing the short Scripture accounts of the Christian rites above mentioned, with the minute and circumstantial directions contained in the pretended Apostolical Constitutions, will see the force of this observation in the difference between truth and forgery.

² John xx. 17.

position, that the fact of the ascension was so notorious as to need no mention of it; and the same reason will account for St. Matthew's similar omission of the same event; nor can any solution but this one explain why neither Matthew nor John tell us what became of Christ's person after his resurrection.

Other intimations in St. John's Gospel, of the then general notoriety of the story, are the following. His manner of introducing his narrative (ch. i. ver. 15.), 'John bare witness of him, and cried, saying'—evidently presupposes that his readers knew who John was. His rapid parenthetical reference to John's imprisonment, 'For John was not yet cast into prison,'¹ could only come from a writer, whose mind was in the habit of considering John's imprisonment as perfectly notorious. The description of Andrew by the addition 'Simon Peter's brother,'² takes for granted, that Peter was well known. His name had not been mentioned before. The evangelist's noticing the prevailing misconstruction of a discourse, which Christ held with the beloved disciple,³ proves that the characters and the discourse were already public.

These four circumstances; 1. the recognition of the account, in its principal parts, by a series of succeeding writers; 2. the total absence of any account of the origin of the religion substantially different from ours; 3. the early and extensive prevalence of rites and institutions which result from our account; and, 4. our account bearing, in its construction, proof that it is an account of facts which were known and believed at the time;—are sufficient to assure us that the story which we have now, is, in general, the story which Christians had at the beginning.

And if our evidence stopped here, we should have a strong case to offer: for we should have to allege, that in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, certain persons,

¹ John iii. 24.

² Ibid. i. 40.

³ Ibid. xxi. 24.

who attempted to establish a new religion in the world, voluntarily encountered dangers, and sustained sufferings, all for a miraculous story, which they published wherever they came; and that the resurrection of a dead man, whom during his life they had followed, was a constant part of this story. I know nothing in the above statement which can, with any appearance of reason, be disputed; and I know nothing, in the history of the human species, similar to it.

CHAPTER VIII.

That it was, in the main, the Story which we have now, proved from the Authority of our Historical Scriptures.

Having thus shown the identity, in leading points, between the present and past records of the religion, our next inquiry is to ascertain whether such credit can be given to those records, that a fact may be accounted true, if detailed there; or whether they are to be considered as merely the accounts of the apostles, without reference to their truth or falsehood.

But before we can enter on this inquiry, we must first ascertain what we really know of the books and their authors.

Now, in treating the question touching the credit to be given to the historians, it is fit to remark, that, such was the situation of the parties to whom the four Gospels are ascribed, that it is sufficient for our purpose if only one out of the four be genuine.

The received author of the first was an original apostle and emissary of the religion; of the second, an inhabitant of Jerusalem, to whose house the apostles resorted, and himself an attendant on one of the most eminent of them; of the third, a fellow-traveller of the most active of the teachers of the religion; and of the fourth, one of the original apostles.

Such a history carries with it *prima facie* evidence of truth that no other histories can supply. All the

writers lived at the time and on the spot. Two were eye-witnesses of many of the facts, and ear-witnesses of many of the discourses they relate ; and, as they wrote on a subject in which they were deeply engaged, they could not fail, by repeating the history to others, to preserve their recollection of the facts, and especially of the miracles detailed, with all the circumstances of time, place, and person. With this guarantee against forgetfulness, the narratives of Matthew and John must be substantially true, or wilful falsehoods. If the latter, the forgers and utterers of such falsehoods must, unless the Christian story be a fiction throughout, have sacrificed their ease and safety for a purpose the most inconsistent with dishonest intentions. They were villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs for a cause they knew to be false.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke are, if genuine, the narratives of, not indeed eye-witnesses, but of those who lived on terms of intimacy with parties who had been eye and ear-witnesses of the events related. In this respect few historians can be compared with these two evangelists, as being so nearly connected with the subject of their narrative.

The situation, however, of the writers applies rather to the credit due to their authority. But, for the present, we use their testimony to prove that the facts, whether true or false, are the sort of facts which the primitive Christians promulgated. Now, what is the allegation before us, and what the proof? The allegation states that a set of men went about propagating a religion founded on the performance of miracles, and calling on mankind to abandon their old creed, and take up a new one, and to lead a new life ; and that in confirmation of their own belief in the truth of such miracles, they exposed themselves to dangers and sufferings. The proof required is the production of some specific accounts of such miracles. Now, of these accounts, some are furnished by two of the ori-

ginal apostles; another portion comes from an attendant of one of the number; and a portion is likewise furnished by a fourth, who was the fellow-traveller of the most active of the missionaries, who, in the course of these travels was frequently brought into the society of the rest, and who prefaces his history by stating, that he is going to relate what had been told by those who were eye-witnesses of the facts. No information can be more satisfactory than this; whose full force will be felt most sensibly, if we consider how weak the argument would have been without it. For, let us suppose all the facts to be such as they are respecting the religion, but that no history existed except what had been written long after the times when the events were said to have happened; we should have been fully justified in our want of belief from the defective nature of the testimony; for though the parties might have acted as they were reported to have done, yet, we might say that we did not possess testimony enough to prove the fact; for what we required was the evidence of contemporaries, or of those, at least, who were in direct connexion with them. Such evidence, if our books be genuine, we have, and of the very kind which, *a priori*, would be most desirable.

But I have said, that if only one of the four Gospels be genuine, we have evidence sufficient for our purpose. If Matthew's Gospel be really his, we have the narrative of an eye-witness of some of the miracles, and consequently a standard to measure other miracles attributed to Christ. If it be not his, still, if the Gospel of John be genuine, the same observation holds good with equal force. But if the Gospels of Matthew and John be both spurious, still, if the narratives of Mark or Luke be either of them genuine, we have the accounts of either a contemporary of the apostles, or of an associate of the most conspicuous convert; authority quite sufficient to prove, not indeed that mi-

racles were done by Christ, but that his disciples asserted they were so done.

But in thus encountering the risk of error in assigning the authors of our books, we are entitled to the advantage of as many separate probabilities as the number of the histories amounts to ; of which, if only one be genuine, we have enough for our purpose. For, admitting that both Matthew and Luke are not genuine, but that Mark was in reality, what he is said to be, a contemporary of the apostles, and that he merely compiled, what I am willing to allow he did, his own from Matthew's Gospel ; still, this very act of compilation proves the authority of the original, which remains the same, whether Matthew be its real author or not.

Again, a similarity in sentences and words has been traced between Matthew and Luke. Now, though this similarity proves either that Luke consulted Matthew's narrative, or that both drew from a common source, (and either supposition is consistent with Luke's own preface) still, while nothing is lost to our cause by admitting the spuriousness of Matthew's Gospel, much is gained by showing that the sources from which both drew were similar.

Hence, if the Gospel of Luke alone be genuine, we may give up the genuineness of Matthew and Mark, without weakening the evidence, except so far as the absence of a presumed eye-witness, in the person of Matthew, may produce such an effect.

The Gospel of St. John is, confessedly, independent testimony ; and, until its genuineness be disproved, we are at liberty to say that we possess one document, at least, containing a story, such as the original emissaries of the religion delivered, and a standard by which the veracity of the rest, (whether genuine, or not, is a matter of secondary importance) may be measured.

Next to the question, touching the authority of the Gospels taken separately, is the one relating to their authority taken together.

Now, though there is in the evangelic history an accumulation of evidence, which scarcely any other history possesses, still our habitual method of reading the Scriptures leads us to overlook the fact. Hence, while we consider any passage connected with the Scriptures in the light of additional testimony, when found in Clemens, Ignatius, or Polycarp, we do not as readily consider each of the different parts of the New Testament as so many independent witnesses. But were we in the habit of dwelling more fully than we do on this fact, we should find such a successive disclosure of proof, as would satisfy us that a story, told by different persons, agreeing with each other in the main points, and disagreeing only so far as to do away even the suspicion of collusion, must be founded in truth. And if such would be our conclusion, from a careful perusal of the evangelists, taken as separate witnesses, our faith in their credit, and in the reality of the story, would be established not a little, if we should meet with another distinct history of the same age; which taking up the subject where the others had left it, carried on the narrative of the effects produced then and still subsisting by the propagation of the miraculous story. But if, in addition to the evidence alluded to, we should possess letters written by some of the principal agents in the business during the time of their participation in it, in which the writers, recognising the original story, agitated the questions that arose out of it, pressed the obligations that resulted from it, and gave directions to those who acted on it, we should find our previous conclusions supported by an accumulation of proofs, which no single testimony could support; but whose full force is not felt, only because we are accustomed to regard the aggregate of evidence as parts of one testimony.

The value of their aggregate testimony may be likewise seen, if we compare what might have been expected to be done with what has been actually done. Thus, while the transactions were recent and the original witnesses at hand; and while the apostles were busied in preaching and forming every where societies of converts in the midst of persecution and in a state of continual alarm, it is not probable that persons thus engaged in active life could or would write histories for the information of posterity. But it is very probable that emergencies would draw from some of them occasional letters on the subject of their mission addressed to one or more converts, which would be received and read with a respect proportioned to the character of the writer. In the mean time, accounts obtained from eye-witnesses, but, by accident or design, reported incorrectly, would get abroad; and as the extension of the Christian society would prevent an intercourse with the apostles, some of them would probably feel the necessity of stopping the circulation of such incorrect accounts by the publication of more authentic memoirs; on the appearance of which, the others would fall into neglect, while the more correct would become the manuals of religion to all the Christian converts.

Such would appear *a priori* the natural course of events; and such has in fact taken place. Thus, we have letters of the kind described above, and preserved, doubtless, for the reason assigned. But as the letters were not written with a view to give a history of Christianity, but rather to remind the converts of the duties required in their new faith, they contain only allusions to the Christian story: but even from such apparently inconsiderable sources we have been able to draw considerable attestations to the truth of our accounts. For the circumstantial events of the history itself we can appeal to five extant narratives, bearing the names of persons acquainted with the

truth of the facts they relate ; and three of them purporting, in the body of the story, to be written by such persons ; while all five were in the hands of the immediate followers of the first apostles, and afterwards received by all subsequent Christian societies, if not as the only authentic documents, at least as not inferior to any others.

Thus, then, it appears that we possess, in the New Testament itself, not a solitary testimony, but a collection of proofs ; and that the evidence is really such as would be required, *a priori*, to establish the truth of the Christian story.

But though the genuineness of the historical books be a point of importance, yet it is not so important to our argument, as to destroy, by its absence, the position we have laid down, viz. that the Gospels exhibit the story which the first apostles preached, and for which they suffered. For let us suppose that we knew nothing more of these books than that they were written by some early Christians ; and that, received as authentic records by the converts nearest to the time of the apostles, they were made the grounds of their faith ; the mere recognition would be of itself proof, whoever were the authors, that the books accorded with the tenets of the apostles ; for otherwise they would not have been so received. Now the fact of their early existence and reception is proved by ancient authors, who do not even name the writers ; two of whom, as is already stated, disclose in the body of their narrative, not indeed the name of the writer, but describe themselves as being one an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ, and the other as contemporary of the apostles. In the Gospel of St. John, xix. 35. after describing the crucifixion, with the circumstance of piercing Christ's side, the historian adds, 'and he that saw it bare record, and his record is true ; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.' Again, xxi. 24. after relating a conversation between

Peter and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' it is added, 'this is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.' This testimony is not less worthy of regard, because it is, in one view, imperfect. The name is not mentioned ; which, if fraud had been intended, would have been done. The third of our present Gospels purports to have been written by the writer of the Acts; in the latter part of which history, the author, by using in various places the first person plural, declares himself to have been a contemporary of all, and a companion of one, of the original preachers of the religion.

CHAPTER IX.

On the Authenticity of the Scriptures.

Having thus shown the credit due to the evangelic history, if only one of the Gospels be considered genuine ; or that, if not ascribed to their real authors, they were one or all received as authentic by the earliest Christians ; and also how strong is the cumulative weight of the evidence afforded by different portions of the New Testament ; we proceed to show how high the probability is that the histories actually came from the persons whose names they bear.

But before we enter on this particular discussion, it is necessary to remark—

1. That of the Gospels we possess many ancient manuscripts ; one of which is called the Alexandrine, and, still preserved in the British Museum, is at least seven hundred years anterior to the era of printing ; that we have also many ancient versions of the same books, some of which are written in languages no longer spoken, either now, or for many ages past ; and hence we show that the Gospels are not a production of modern times. Farther, from the number of manuscripts found in countries distant from each other, we prove the general diffusion of those religious

books; while from the fact that such records have suffered less injury from frequent transcription than other authors, we infer the value that was set on their contents, and the consequent care to preserve them as pure as possible.

II. The style of the Gospel writings is such as would be expected only from persons living at the time when, and the place where they are supposed to have lived: for it is the style neither of classic authors, nor of the Greek fathers, but of Greek written by persons of Hebrew origin; abounding, as it does, with Hebraic and Syriac idioms, such as would be found in the compositions of men, who used a language, spoken indeed in the place where they lived, but not the common dialect of the country. To this proof in favor of their genuineness should be added the improbability of a forgery: for who should forge them? Not the Christian fathers: for they were generally ignorant of Hebrew, and therefore unable to introduce Hebraisms into their style; and the few who did know Hebrew, such as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Epiphanius, wrote in a language perfectly dissimilar to that of the New Testament. The Nazarenes, who understood Hebrew, used probably the Gospel of St. Matthew, written originally in Hebrew, and therefore cannot be suspected of having forged the rest of the sacred writings. The argument, then, proves at least the antiquity of these books; and they must belong to the age of the apostles, for they could be composed in no other.¹

III. But in fact the genuineness of the books seems to have been questioned, only so far as it seemed to affect the credit due to the authors, as the narrators of

¹ See this argument in Michaelis's Introduction (Marsh's translation), i. ii. 10. from which these observations are taken.

supernatural stories; for had they told merely an ordinary tale, no more question would have been raised respecting their writings, than is raised about the writings of Josephus and Philo. And yet, after all, the genuineness has nothing to do with the veracity of a history. Thus in Bede we find many wonderful stories; but who for that reason doubts of Bede being the writer? In like manner we do not deny the genuineness of the Koran, though it contains things we do not admit; neither ought the genuineness of the Scriptures to be denied, because they contain accounts of things that stagger belief.

iv. Had the writings been easy to be forged, many, probably, would have appeared under the name of Christ himself; for as none would have been received with so much avidity, none would have afforded so great a temptation to forgery. Yet only one attempt of this kind was made; and so far from being generally received, it is not even mentioned by any writer of the first three centuries. The Epistle of Christ to Abgarus king of Edessa, preserved by Eusebius,¹ and acknowledged by him, not without hesitation, has been rejected at once by others as an interpolation.²

v. Had not the ascription of the Gospels to their present authors been genuine, they would have, probably, been ascribed to persons more eminent. As the matter now stands, the first three are assigned to

¹ Hist. Eccl. i. 15.

² Augustin, A. D. 895. (De Consens. Evang. c. 34.) had heard that the Pagans pretended to be possessed of an epistle from Christ to Peter and Paul: but he had never seen it, and appears to doubt of its existence, whether genuine or spurious. No other ancient writer mentions it: he also, and he alone, notices, and that in order to condemn it, an epistle ascribed to Christ by the Manichees, A. D. 270. and a short hymn attributed to him by the Priscillianists, A. D. 378. (cont. Faust. Man. lib. xxviii. c. 4.) The lateness of the writer who notices these things, the manner in which he notices them, and, above all, the silence of every preceding writer, render them unworthy of consideration.

persons who, by their situation, were able to obtain correct information, and likely to impart it honestly; but who in other respects were little fitted for the character of narrators of scenes in which they took only secondary parts. Of Matthew little is said, and that little not calculated to exalt his character: of Mark we hear nothing in the Gospels; and where he is spoken of in the Acts and Epistles, he is spoken of without much praise; while the name of Luke is mentioned in St. Paul's epistles very transiently. The ascription, therefore, of the Gospels to such persons arose, probably, from the fact, that they were the real writers.

VI. Christian writers and congregations soon agreed on this subject; a circumstance of some weight, considering their great difference of opinion on many other points; and as this canon of Scripture was fixed without the interference of public authority, it could have been only in consequence of an uncontested tradition; in obedience to which the first council of Laodicea, in A. D. 363. regulated, probably, the judgment of some 30 or 40 neighboring churches of Lydia and the adjoining countries: for beyond that circle numerous Christian writers discussed with great freedom, and without reference to the council of Laodicea, the question as to what books should be received as Scripture.

But though the preceding considerations cannot be neglected, they are not put forth as arguments for the genuineness of the Gospels; a point which ancient testimony can alone prove satisfactorily.

This testimony it is necessary to exhibit in detail. It is not enough for our purpose to show that we have the same reason for believing the genuineness of the Gospels, as we have for asserting that Cæsar, Cicero, and Virgil, are the authors of the Commentaries, Orations, and *Æneid*. We must, as we can, do

more, from the greater number, variety, and early date of our testimonies ; and, because it is more requisite in our books than in theirs, to distinguish the genuine from spurious competitors.

In a work, however, like the present, it is difficult to find a place for evidence of this kind. To pursue the details of proof throughout, would be to transcribe a great part of Lardner's 11 vols. 8vo : to leave the argument without proofs, is to leave it without effect ; for the persuasion produced by this species of evidence depends on a close induction only of the particulars which compose it.

The method which I propose to myself is, first, to place before the reader in one view the propositions which comprise the several heads of our testimony ; and afterwards to repeat the same propositions in so many distinct sections, with the necessary authorities subjoined to each.

The following, then, are the allegations on the subject, which are capable of being established by proof :—

I. That the four Gospels and the Acts, are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of Christian writers, beginning with contemporaries of the apostles, or those who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

II. That when they are quoted, or alluded to, they are so with peculiar respect, as books *sui generis* ; as possessing an authority belonging to no other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians.

III. That they were, in very early times, collected into a distinct volume.

IV. That they were distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect.

V. That they were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians.

VI. That commentaries were written, harmonies formed, different copies carefully collated, and versions of them made into different languages.

VII. That they were received by Christians of different sects, and usually appealed to by both sides in the controversies which arose in those days.

VIII. That the four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen Epistles of St. Paul, the first Epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received, without doubt, by those who doubted concerning the other books included in our present canon.

IX. That the Gospels were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as books containing accounts on which the religion was founded.

X. That formal catalogues of authentic Scriptures were published; in all which our present sacred histories were included.

XI. That these propositions cannot be affirmed of any other books claiming to be books of Scripture; by which are meant those books which are called apocryphal books of the New Testament.

SECTION I.

Quotations of the Historical Scriptures by ancient Christian Writers.

The medium of proof stated in this proposition is the most unquestionable, because it is the least liable to fraud, and is not diminished by time. Burnet, in the History of his own Times, inserts extracts from Clarendon's History. One such extract proves that Clarendon's History was extant, read, and received as genuine and authentic when Burnet wrote. The testimonies¹ we have to bring forward under this proposition are the following:—

1. In an epistle ascribed to Barnabas, the com-

¹ These testimonies are almost all extracted from Lardner's work: my office has been merely to arrange them.

panion of Paul, quoted as genuine by many of the fathers, and purporting to have been written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, appears the following remarkable passage: 'Let us therefore beware lest it come on us, *as it is written*, There are many called, but few chosen.' From the words, 'as it is written,' the very form in which the Jews quoted their Scripture, we infer, that when the author lived, there was a book extant, well known, and of authority among Christians, containing these words, 'Many are called, few chosen.' In our Gospel of St. Matthew this text is twice found,¹ and in no other book now known. It is evident therefore that the writer of this epistle was a Jew, and that the books from which he quoted had acquired a kind of scriptural authority.

Beside this passage, there are also in that epistle several others agreeing in sentiment, and two or three in words with St. Matthew.

II. We have an epistle written by Clement, bishop of Rome, universally acknowledged to be the person mentioned by St. Paul, Phil. iv. 3. This epistle affords, amongst others, the following valuable passages: 'Especially remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, which he spake, teaching gentleness and long-suffering; for this he said, Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you,' &c.² Again, 'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus; for he said, Wo to that man by whom offences come: it were better for him that he had not been born than that he should offend one of my elect: it were better that a millstone should be tied about his neck,' &c.³ It is to be observed, that as this epistle was written in the name of the church of Rome, and addressed to that of Corinth, it exhibits the judgment, not only of Clement, but of these churches themselves, as to the authority at least of the books referred to.

¹ Matth. xx. 16. xxii. 14. ² Matth. vii. 1, 2. Luke vi. 37, 38.

³ Matth. xviii. 6. Luke xvii. 2.

It may be said that since Clement has not given the words as a quotation, it is not certain that he refers to any book whatever ; or he might have heard the words of Christ from the apostles, or received them through oral tradition. To this we reply, 1. that Clement, without any mark of reference, uses a passage now found in the Epistle to the Romans, and some remarkable sentiments in the Epistle to the Hebrews: 2. that there are many sentences of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians quoted in Clement's epistle, without any sign of quotation : and, 3. that this method of adopting the words of Scripture without acknowledgment was in general use among the most ancient Christian writers. But grant that Clement had heard these words from the apostles or primitive teachers, still this will prove equally well our assertion, that the Scriptures contain what the apostles taught.

III. Near the end of the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul sends among others to 'salute Hermas.' Now there is great probability that this Hermas is the author of a book called 'The Shepherd of Hermas;' in which tacit allusions are made to the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John : nor does the weak character of the work detract from our argument. It is the age in which it was composed that gives value to the testimony ; and that is rendered certain by the quotations of Irenæus, Clemens of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen.

IV. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, about 37 years after Christ's ascension, and who had probably known several of the apostles, in his Epistles undoubtedly alludes to the Gospels of Matthew and John, unaccompanied with marks of quotation ; for instance, 'Be ye wise as serpents in all things, and harmless as a dove.'¹ 'Yet the Spirit is not deceived, being from God : for

¹ Matth. x. 16.

it knows where it comes, and whither it goes.' ¹ In one place Ignatius speaks of St. Paul in terms of high respect, and quotes his Epistle to the Ephesians; in others he borrows words and sentiments from the same Epistle without mentioning it; which shows his general manner of using and applying writings then extant, and of high authority.

v. Polycarp, who had been taught by the apostles, and had conversed with many who had seen Christ, in one short and undoubted epistle has nearly forty clear allusions to the books of the New Testament. In one of these he clearly fixes the authority of the Lord's Prayer and its use among Christians: another is the following, showing that the words of Christ were thus early quoted, as spoken by him: 'But remembering what the Lord said, teaching, Judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.' ² It is manifest therefore that the books quoted by Polycarp were considered by him as authentic accounts of Christ's discourses.

vi. Papias, a hearer of St. John, ascribes their respective Gospels to Matthew and Mark; and assuming this as a fact perfectly well known, he tells us from what materials Mark collected his account, viz. from Peter's preaching, and in what language Matthew wrote, viz. in Hebrew. Hence it appears, whatever may be the character of Papias, that these books bore the names of Matthew and Mark in his time.

All of the writers hitherto quoted conversed with some of the apostles; and though their writings, which remain, are generally but short pieces, they are very valuable from their antiquity, and for the testimony they bear to our historical Scriptures. They offer of

¹ John iii. 8.

² Matth. vii. 1, 2. Luke vi. 37, 38.

course but few quotations; for the Scriptures did not then, as now, form an integral part of a Christian's education.

VII. Not much more than 20 years after Papias follows Justin Martyr; who, in two of his principal works, makes between 20 and 30 distinct and copious extracts from the Gospels and Acts.

All the references in Justin are made without mentioning the author; thus proving the notoriety of these books, and that no others were so received, as to make it necessary to distinguish these from the rest. But though Justin mentions not the author's name, he calls the books 'Memoirs composed by the apostles and their companions;' descriptions which exactly suit with the titles which the Gospels and Acts now bear.

But what is very remarkable in the case of Justin is, that though a life of Christ might be almost made out of his writings, he has only twice mentioned something as said or done by Christ, which is not found in our books; which shows that these Gospels were the authorities from which the Christians of that day drew the information on which they depended.

With regard, however, to the saying attributed to Christ, 'In whatsoever I shall find you, in the same I will also judge you,' Justin, say the learned, probably had in mind the words in Ezekiel, whom he had just before quoted, 'I will judge them according to their ways;' and therefore by the words originally in Justin, 'The Lord God has said,' is meant not Christ, but Jehovah; a fact which the scribe was ignorant of, who thus interpolated the passage: 'our Lord Jesus Christ has said;' (see Jones's *Canons of Criticism*, vol. i. p. 539.) and with regard to the fact, (noticed, according to Epiphanius, in the Gospel of the Hebrews) that at Christ's baptism a luminous or fiery appearance was seen on the water, Justin himself speaks of it in terms of doubt.

VIII. Hegesippus, who lived about 30 years after

Justin, relates, that travelling from Palestine to Rome, he visited many bishops, and that 'in every succession and in every city, the same doctrine is taught, which the Law, the prophets, and the Lord teacheth.' This is an important attestation; for by the word 'Lord' Hegesippus intended some writing containing the teaching of Christ; in which sense alone the term combines with the terms 'Law and prophets.'

ix. About the year 170, the churches of Lyons and Vienne sent a relation of their sufferings to the churches of Asia in an epistle preserved by Eusebius; in which are exact references to Luke, John, and the Acts. That from St. John (xvi. 2.) is in these words: 'Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, was at that time ninety years old, and his early life must therefore have joined the apostolic age.

x. The evidence now becomes full and clear. Irenæus, a disciple of Polycarp, succeeded Pothinus. The testimony which this writer affords to the authority and titles of the historical books of the New Testament is express, positive, and exclusive. One passage, in particular, asserts positively our very argument, viz. that the story which the Gospels exhibit is that which the apostles told. 'We have not received,' says Irenæus, 'the knowledge of the way of our salvation by any others than those by whom the Gospel has been brought to us: which Gospel they first preached, and afterwards, by the will of God, committed to writing, that it might be for time to come the foundation and pillar of our faith,' &c.

But the testimony of Irenæus for our Gospels is to the exclusion of all others. I allude to a remarkable passage in his works, in which, for some fanciful reasons, he endeavors to show, that there could be nei-

ther more nor fewer Gospels than four. With his argument we have no concern. The position itself proves that four, and only four, Gospels were at that time acknowledged. He mentions how Matthew begins his Gospel; how Mark begins and ends his; enumerates the several passages of Christ's history in Luke, not found in the other evangelists; and states the particular design with which St. John composed his Gospel, accounting for the doctrinal declarations preceding his narrative. To the Acts of the Apostles, their author, and credit, the testimony of Irenæus is no less explicit; and he refers to the account of St. Paul's conversion in the ninth chapter of that book. It is to be remarked, that in an author abounding with allusions to the Scriptures, there is not one reference to any apocryphal Christian writing whatever, thus making a broad line of distinction between our sacred books, and the pretensions of all others.

The force of the testimony of this period is much strengthened by considering it as the concurring testimony of writers living in countries remote from each other. Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin Martyr in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

x1. Omitting Athenagoras and Theophilus, in the works of the former of whom are clear references to Mark and Luke, and in those of the latter evident allusions to Matthew and John; observing also that the works of two learned Christian writers of that age, Miltiades and Pantænus, are now lost, we come to one of the most voluminous of ancient Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria, who followed Irenæus at the distance of only sixteen years, and therefore maintains the series of testimony in uninterrupted continuation. In certain of Clement's works, quoted by Eusebius, is a distinct account of the order in which the four Gospels were written. Those containing the genealogies were written first; Mark's next, at the instance of

Peter's followers ; and John's last ; and this account he tells us he received from presbyters of more ancient times. In the remaining works of this ancient father, the four Gospels are repeatedly quoted by name, and the Acts of the Apostles is expressly ascribed to Luke.

XII. In the age in which they lived, Tertullian joins on with Clement. The number of Gospels then received, the names of the evangelists, and their proper descriptions, are thus exhibited by this writer : ' Among the apostles, John and Matthew teach us the faith ; among apostolical men, Luke and Mark refresh it.' He fixes the universality with which the Gospels were received, and their antiquity ; that they were in the hands of all, and had been so from the first ; and this evidence appears not more than a hundred and fifty years after the publication of the books. This author also frequently cites the Acts of the Apostles ; once he calls it ' Luke's Commentary,' and observes how St. Paul's epistles confirm it.

XIII. An interval of only thirty years, occupied by no small number of Christian writers,¹ in every one of whom is contained some reference to the Gospels, (and in Hippolytus, as preserved in Theodoret, is an abstract of the whole Gospel history) brings us to the celebrated Origen of Alexandria ; who, in an extract from his works by Eusebius, expressly declares, ' that the four Gospels alone are received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven ;' to which declaration is subjoined a brief history of the respective authors. His attestation to the Acts is no less positive ; and he notices certain apocryphal Gospels but to censure them.

XIV. Gregory of Neocæsarea and Dionysius of

¹ Minucius Felix, Apollonius, Caius, Asterius, Urbanus, Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, Hippolytus, Ammonius, Julius Africanus.

Alexandria were scholars of Origen, and their testimony is but a repetition of his. The series, however, is continued by Cyprian, who flourished about twenty years after Origen. 'The church,' says he, 'is watered, like Paradise, by four rivers, that is, by four Gospels.' The Acts, likewise, and other parts of Scripture, are frequently quoted by this father.

xv. Passing by a crowd of writers,¹ following Cyprian within forty years, and who all either cite the historical Scriptures, or speak of them with profound respect, I single out Victorian, bishop of Pettaw, on account of the remoteness of his situation from that of Origen and Cyprian, who were Africans. This bishop, in a commentary on the four beasts in the Revelations, makes out that by the four creatures are intended the four Gospels. The explication is fanciful, but the testimony positive. He also expressly cites the Acts of the Apostles.

xvi. About the year 300, Arnobius and Lactantius composed formal arguments on the credibility of the Christian religion. As these were addressed to Gentiles, the authors abstain from quoting Christian books by name; but when they state the outlines of Christ's history, it is apparent that they are drawn from our Gospels; for they exhibit a summary of almost every thing related of Christ's actions and miracles by the four evangelists.

The last testimony we shall produce is that of Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, who flourished in the year 315. This distinguished writer, besides a variety of other works, composed a history of Christianity from its origin to his own time: his testimony to the Scriptures is that of a man conversant in the works of Christian authors during the first three centuries, and

¹ Novatus, Rome, A. D. 251; Dionysius, Rome, A. D. 259; Commodian, A. D. 270; Anatolius, Laodicea, A. D. 270; Theognostus, A. D. 282; Methodius, Lycia, A. D. 290; Phileas, Egypt, A. D. 296.

who had read many which are now lost. In a passage of his Evangelical Demonstration, he remarks the delicacy of two of the evangelists, when noticing any circumstances which regarded themselves; and of Mark, as writing under Peter's direction in the circumstances which regarded him. In illustration of this remark, he makes long quotations from each of the evangelists; and in a passage of the Ecclesiastical History, treats, in form, and at large, of the occasion of writing the four Gospels, and of the order in which they were written. He then proceeds to show that John wrote the last of the four, and that his Gospel was intended to supply the omissions of the others. This writer makes no use of Christian writings, forged with the names of Christ's apostles or their companions.

We close this branch of our evidence here, because, after Eusebius, the works of Christian writers are as full of texts of Scripture and references to it, as the discourses of modern divines. Future testimonies, therefore, could only prove that the Scriptures never lost their character and authority.

SECTION II.

Of the peculiar Respect with which the Scriptures were quoted by ancient Christian Writers.

Besides the general strain of reference and quotation which indicates this distinction, the following may be regarded as specific testimonies.

1. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the apostles, when quoting one of our Gospels, writes thus: 'These things the holy Scriptures teach us, and all who were moved by the Holy Spirit; among whom John says, In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God.' Again, speaking of the Prophets and Gospels, he says, 'that

all, being inspired, spoke by one and the same Spirit of God.'

II. A writer against Artemon, supposed to come about a hundred and fifty years after the publication of the Scriptures, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, thus speaks: 'Possibly what they (our adversaries) say, might have been credited, if, first of all, the Divine Scriptures did not contradict them; and then the writings of certain brethren more ancient than the time of Victor:' which proves, 1. that there was a collection called 'Divine Scriptures;' 2. that these were esteemed of higher authority than other religious writings.

III. In a piece ascribed to Hippolytus, who lived near the same time, the author professes, in giving his correspondent instruction, 'to draw out of the sacred fountain, and to set before him from the sacred Scriptures what may afford him satisfaction.' He then quotes Paul's Epistles to Timothy, besides other books of sacred writ.

IV. 'Our assertions and discourses,' says Origen, 'are unworthy of credit; we must receive the Scriptures as witnesses.' After treating of the duty of prayer, he proceeds: 'What we have said may be proved from the Divine Scriptures:' thus affording abundant evidence of the peculiar authority of the Scriptures.

V. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, whose age lies close to that of Origen, exhorts Christian teachers, in all doubtful cases, 'to go back to the fountain; and if the truth has in any case been shaken, to recur to the Gospels and apostolical writings.'

VI. Novatus, a Roman, contemporary with Cyprian, appeals expressly to the Scriptures, as the authority by which all errors were to be repelled, and disputes decided.

VII. Twenty years afterward, Anatolius, bishop of Laodicea, speaking of the rule for keeping Easter,

says of those whom he opposed, 'They can by no means prove their point by the authority of the divine Scriptures.'

VIII. The Arians, who sprung up about fifty years after this, argued strenuously against the use of the words 'consubstantial,' 'essence,' and like phrases, 'because they were not in Scripture.' One of their advocates thus addresses Augustin: 'If you allege any thing from the Divine Scriptures common to both, I must hear. But unscriptural expressions deserve no regard.' Athanasius, after having enumerated the books of the Old and New Testament, adds, 'These are the fountain of salvation.'

IX. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, uses these words: 'Concerning the divine and holy mysteries of faith, not the least article ought to be delivered without the Divine Scriptures.' These Scriptures were the same as ours, for Cyril has left a catalogue of the books included under that name.

X. Epiphanius, twenty years after, challenges the Arians, and followers of Origen, 'to produce any passage of the Old and New Testament, favoring their sentiments.'

XI. Phœbadius, a Gallic bishop, about thirty years after the council of Nice, testifies that 'the bishops of that council first consulted the sacred volumes, and then declared their faith.'

XII. Basil, bishop of Cæsarea, says, 'that hearers instructed in the Scriptures, ought to examine what is said by their teachers, and to embrace what is agreeable to the Scriptures, and to reject what is otherwise.'

XIII. Ephraim the Syrian, a celebrated writer of the same times, thus speaks: 'The truth written in the sacred volume of the Gospel, is a perfect rule. Nothing can be taken from it nor added to it, without great guilt.'

XIV. Jerome, in the year 400, observes of the 'an-

cient' Christian writers, that they distinguished between books: some they quoted as of authority, and others not: which observation relates to Scripture, compared with apocryphal or heathen writings.

SECTION III.

The Scriptures were in very early Times collected into a distinct Volume.

I. Ignatius, who had conversed with the apostles, so speaks of the Gospel and the apostles, as to render it probable that he meant by the Gospel, the volume of the Gospels, and by the apostles, the volume of their epistles. About eighty years after, we have direct proof in Clement of Alexandria, that these two names, 'Gospel' and 'Apostles' were terms by which the writings of the New Testament were usually expressed. This interpretation of the word 'Gospel' is also confirmed by the relation of the martyrdom of Polycarp by the church of Smyrna, where, what is called 'the Gospels' seems to be the history of Christ, and his doctrine.

II. Eusebius relates, that Quadratus and others, who were the immediate successors of the apostles, in their travels carried 'the Gospels' with them, and delivered them to their converts, about sixty or seventy years after their first publication. It is evident therefore that they must, before this time, have been in general esteem in the churches planted by the apostles, and, as we find, collected into a volume.

III. Irenæus, in the year 178, puts the evangelic and apostolic writings in connexion with the Law and Prophets, intending by the one a code of Christian, and by the other a code of Jewish sacred writings.

IV. Melito, at this time bishop of Sardis, says that he had procured an accurate account of the books of the Old Testament, thus clearly proving that there

was then a collection of writings called the New Testament.

v. About fifteen years afterwards, Clement of Alexandria thus alludes to the division of the Christian Scriptures: 'There is a consent and harmony between the Law and the Prophets, the Apostles and the Gospel.'

vi. In Tertullian, the contemporary of Clement, the whole is called 'the New Testament,' and the two parts 'the Gospels and Apostles.'

vii. From Cyprian, and many other writers of the third century, we learn that the Christian Scriptures were divided into two volumes; one called 'the Gospels, or Scriptures of the Lord;' the other 'the Apostles, or Epistles of the Apostles.'

viii. Eusebius takes some pains to show that the Gospel of St. John had been justly placed by the ancients 'the fourth in order, and after the other three;' thus incontestably proving that the four Gospels had been collected into an exclusive volume, and that their order had been adjusted with much consideration by those who were called 'ancients' in his time.

In the Diocletian persecution, A.D. 303. the Scriptures were sought after and burnt; and many suffered death rather than deliver them up. On the other hand, Constantine, after his conversion, multiplied the copies of the divine oracles, adorning them at the expense of the treasury. What the Christians of that age thus embellished in their prosperity, and preserved under persecution, was the very volume of the New Testament which we now read.

SECTION IV.

The Scriptures were distinguished by appropriate Names and Titles of Respect.

i. Polycarp says 'I trust that ye are well exercised in the Christian Scriptures,' &c. This passage is ex-

tremely important; since it proves that in the time of Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, there were Christian writings distinguished by the name of 'Holy Scriptures,' or 'Sacred Writings.'

II. Justin Martyr, about thirty years after, expressly cites some of our present histories under the title of 'Gospel,' as the name by which they were generally known in his time.

III. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, about thirty years after, in a passage preserved by Eusebius, speaks of 'the Scriptures of the Lord.'

IV. About the same period, Irenæus comprehends the Scriptures under the appellations of 'Divine Scriptures,' 'Divine Oracles,' 'Scriptures of the Lord,' 'Evangelic and Apostolic Writings.'

V. St. Matthew's Gospel is quoted by Theophilus, contemporary with Irenæus, under the title of 'The Evangelic Voice;' and about fifteen years after, Clement of Alexandria ascribes to the books of the New Testament the titles of 'Sacred Books,' 'Divine Scriptures,' 'the true Evangelical Canon,' &c.

VI. Tertullian, besides adopting most of the names above noticed, calls the Gospels 'our Digesta,' probably in allusion to some collection of Roman laws then extant.

VII. About thirty years after, the same titles are applied by Origen to the Christian Scriptures; and, in addition, this writer frequently speaks of 'The Old and New Testament,' 'the Ancient and New Oracles,' &c.

VIII. Not twenty years later, Cyprian speaks of 'Books of the Spirit,' 'Divine Fountains,' 'Fountain of the Divine Fulness.'

The expressions thus quoted are evidences of high and peculiar respect. They all occur within two centuries from the publication of the books, and some commence with the period of the companions of the apostles.

SECTION V.

The Scriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious Assemblies of the early Christians.

I. Justin Martyr, who wrote A.D. 140. in his first Apology, says, 'The Memoirs of the Apostles, or the Writings of the Prophets, are read according as the time allows.' These Memoirs Justin in another place calls 'the Gospels,' and makes numerous quotations from them: he also describes this as the general usage and established custom of the Christian church.

II. Tertullian says, 'We come together to recollect the Divine Scriptures; we nourish our faith, raise our hope, confirm our trust, by the sacred word.'

III. Eusebius records of Origen, that when he went into Palestine about the year 216, he was desired by the bishops of that country to expound the Scriptures publicly in the church. Origen himself bears witness to the same practice; and many homilies, thus delivered by him, are still extant.

IV. Cyprian gives an account of having ordained two persons, who were before confessors, to be readers of 'the Gospel of Christ, by which martyrs are made.'

V. Imitations of the same custom may be traced in many writers of the fourth century. Augustin, in displaying the benefits resulting from this custom, declares it to be universal. 'The canonical Scriptures,' says he, 'being read every where, the miracles recorded are well known to all.'

No other books, beside our present Scriptures, appear to have been publicly read, except the epistle of Clement, which was read in the Corinthian church, and the Shepherd of Hermas, which was received in many churches. Nor does it subtract much from our argument that these two writings come within it, since

we allow them to be the genuine writings of apostolical men.

SECTION VI.

Commentaries were anciently written on the Scriptures, and Versions made of them into different Languages.

No greater proof can be given of the esteem in which the early Christians held these books, than the labor bestowed on them. There was nothing in them, as works of taste, or as compositions, which could have induced any one to have written a note on them : moreover, it shows that they were even then considered ancient books; since men do not write comments on publications of their own times. Evidence is thus afforded, which carries up the evangelic writings much beyond the age of the testimonies, and their reputed authors.

I. Tatian, who florished about the year 170. composed a harmony, or collation of the Gospels, which he called, ' Diatessaron,' i. e. Of the Four. This title shows, that then, as now, there were four, and only four Gospels in general use, a little more than a hundred years after the publication of some of them.

II. Pantænus, a man of great learning, about twenty years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries on the Scriptures, which were extant in the time of Jerome.

III. Clement of Alexandria wrote short explanations of many books of the Old and New Testament.

IV. Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later version, then in use, to the authentic Greek.

V. An anonymous author, quoted by Eusebius, about A. D. 212. appeals to the ' ancient copies ' of the Scriptures in refutation of some corrupt readings.

VI. Eusebius speaks of ' the laudable industry of ancient and ecclesiastical men, as the interpretations of the Divine Scriptures given by each of them show.'

VII. Julius Africanus, about thirty years after this period, wrote an epistle on the apparent differences in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke.

Ammonius, a learned Alexandrian, composed, like Tatian, a harmony of the four Gospels, proving that there were four Gospels, and no more. Origen too wrote commentaries, or homilies, on most of the books included in the New Testament, and none other.

VIII. The third century likewise contains, 1. Dionysius of Alexandria, who compared with great accuracy the accounts in the four Gospels of the time of Christ's resurrection; 2. Victorin, bishop of Pettaw, who commented on St. Matthew's Gospel; 3. Lucian of Antioch, and Hesychius, an Egyptian bishop, who put forth editions of the New Testament.

IX. The fourth century supplies fifteen writers¹ on the books of the New Testament, of whom we notice the following, in order to show the sentiments and studies of learned Christians of that age.

Eusebius wrote expressly on the discrepancies in the Gospels; and likewise a treatise pointing out what things are related by four, what by three, what by two, and what by one evangelist.

Damasus, bishop of Rome, corresponded with Jerome on the exposition of difficult scriptural texts.

Gregory of Nyssen, at one time appeals to the most exact copies of St. Mark's Gospel; at another time he compares and proposes to reconcile, the several accounts of the resurrection given by the four evangelists.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, remarked various readings in the Latin copies of the New Testament, and appeals to the original Greek.

¹ Eusebius, A.D. 315. Juvenus, Spain, 330. Theodore, Thrace, 334. Hilary, Poitiers, 354. Fortunatus, 340. Apollinaris of Laodicea, 362. Damasus, Rome, 366. Gregory Nyssen, 371. Didymus of Alexandria, 370. Ambrose of Milan, 374. Diodore of Tarsus, 378. Gaudentius of Brescia, 387. Theodore of Cilicia, 394. Jerome, 392. Chrysostom, 398.

Jerome put forth an edition of the New Testament in Latin, corrected, as to the Gospels, by Greek copies, 'and those,' he says, 'ancient.'

Lastly, Chrysostom delivered and published many homilies, or sermons, on the Gospels and Acts.

It is needless to bring this article to a lower period: but it is important to add, that no comments on any other books than those in the New Testament are to be found among the writers of the first three centuries, except those of Clemens Alexandrinus on a book called the Revelation of Peter.

One of the most ancient versions of the New Testament is the Syriac, that being the language of Palestine when Christianity was there first established, and into which the Scriptures would soon be translated with a view to their greater circulation. A Syriac translation is now extant, bearing internal marks of high antiquity, supported by the uniform tradition of the east, and confirmed by the discovery of many ancient manuscripts. About 200 years since a bishop of Antioch sent a copy of this translation into Europe to be printed. This was found to contain all our books, except the second epistle of Peter, the second and third of John, and the Revelation, which books, however, have since been discovered in that language in some ancient European manuscripts. In this collection no other book, beside what is in ours, appears to have had a place: and the text differs from ours very little, and in nothing of importance.

SECTION VII.

Our Scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different Sects and Persuasions.

The three most ancient topics of controversy amongst Christians were the authority of the Jewish institution, the origin of evil, and the nature of Christ; and amidst the disputes which these subjects occasioned, it is a

great satisfaction to perceive, what, in a vast plurality of instances we do perceive, all sides recurring to the same Scriptures.

I. Basilides lived about the year 120. He rejected the Jewish institution, and advanced a scheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Christian church. There is positive evidence that he received the Gospel of Matthew, and there is no sufficient evidence that he rejected any of the other three.

II. The Valentinians appeared about the same time, whose heresy consisted in certain notions concerning angelic natures. Irenæus says they endeavored to fetch arguments for their opinions from the evangelic and apostolic writings. Harpocraton, one of the most celebrated of the sect, wrote commentaries on Luke and John ; nor is there reason to doubt that he received the whole New Testament.

III. The Carpocratians, who in some of their opinions resembled what we call Socinians, are charged by Irenæus and Epiphanius with endeavoring to pervert a passage in Matthew ; which is a positive proof that they received that Gospel.

IV. The Sethians, A. D. 150 ; the Montanists, A. D. 156 ; the Marcosians, A. D. 160 ; Hermogenes, A. D. 180 ; Praxias, A. D. 196 ; Artemon, A. D. 200 ; Theodotus, A. D. 200 ; all engaged in controversies with Catholic Christians, and received the New Testament Scriptures.

V. Tatian, who lived A. D. 172, and was the founder of a sect called Encratites, so received the four Gospels as to compose a harmony from them.

VI. From a writer quoted by Eusebius, of about the year 200, it appears that those who contended for Christ's simple humanity, argued from the Scriptures ; for they are accused by this writer of making alterations in their copies, to favor their opinions.

VII. Origen's sentiments excited great controver-

sies; yet both his advocates and opponents acknowledged the same authority of Scripture. In his time (about 150 years after the Scriptures were published) the Christians were reproached by Celsus for their numerous dissensions; yet Origen, who has recorded this accusation, testifies 'that the four Gospels were received, without dispute, by the whole church of God under heaven.'

VIII. Paul of Samosata, about thirty years after Origen, so distinguished himself in the controversy concerning the nature of Christ as to be the subject of two councils or synods assembled at Antioch. Yet he is not charged with rejecting any book of the New Testament.

IX. A controversy at the same time existed with the Noetians or Sabellians, who seem to have gone into the opposite extremes from that of Paul of Samosata and his followers. Yet Epiphanius expressly asserts that Sabellius received all the Scriptures. We have therefore a proof that parties the most opposite to each other acknowledged the authority of Scripture with equal deference.

X. As a general testimony, may be produced what was said by a bishop in the council of Carthage, a little before this time: 'I am of opinion that the blasphemous heretics, who pervert the sacred and adorable words of the Scriptures, should be execrated.' Undoubtedly what they perverted, they received.

XI. The Millennium, Novatianism, the baptism of heretics, the keeping of Easter, engaged also the attention and divided the opinions of Christians at that time, showing how much men were in earnest on the subject; yet every one appealed for the grounds of his opinion to Scripture authority.

XII. The Donatists, who sprung up A. D. 328, used the same Scriptures as we do. 'Produce,' says

Augustin, 'proof from the Scriptures, whose authority is common to us both.'

xiii. It is notorious, that about the year 300, the Arians and Athanasians mutually acknowledged the conclusive authority of Scripture, since they accuse each other of using unscriptural phrases.

xiv. The Priscillianists, A. D. 378. the Pelagians, A. D. 405. used the same Scriptures as we do.

xv. Chrysostom, about A. D. 400, positively affirms the proposition we maintain. 'The general reception of the Gospels is a proof that their history is true and consistent; for, since the writing of the Gospels many heresies have arisen, holding opinions contrary to what is contained in them, who yet receive the Gospels either entire or in part.' I am not moved by what seems a deduction from this testimony, the words 'entire or in part;' for if all questionable parts in our Gospels were given up, it would not affect the miraculous origin of the religion in the smallest degree.

Of all the ancient heretics the most extraordinary was Marcion. Rejecting the Old Testament, as proceeding from an inferior deity, he erased from the New every passage which recognised the Jewish Scriptures; yet this rash and wild controversialist published a chastised edition of St. Luke's Gospel. This example proves that there were always some points which neither the fury of opposition nor the intemperance of controversy would venture to call in question. There is no reason to believe that Marcion ever charged the Catholic Christians with forging their books. Marcion flourished about the year 130.

Noëtus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manicheans, Priscillianists, besides Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and others, received most or all the same books of the New Testament which the Catholics

received ; and respected them, as written by apostles, or their disciples and companions.

SECTION VIII.

The four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, the first of John, and the first of Peter were received without Doubt by those, who doubted concerning the other Books included in our present Canon.

I state this proposition, because it shows that the authenticity of their books was a subject of inquiry among the early Christians ; that where there was cause of doubt they did doubt ; which much strengthens their testimony to such books as were received.

I. Jerome, in his account of Caius, probably a presbyter of Rome near the year 200, speaks of him as reckoning up only thirteen epistles of Paul, and rejecting the 14th, to the Hebrews ; and adds, ‘ With the Romans to this day it is not looked on as Paul’s.’ Eusebius likewise says, ‘ To this time, by some of the Romans, this epistle is not thought to be the apostle’s.’

II. Origen, about twenty years after Caius, expresses his own doubts, and those of others concerning the same epistles, as also the second of Peter, and the third of John, expressly witnessing that ‘ the four Gospels were received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven.’ He also quotes as undoubted, the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul’s first Epistle to the Thessalonians.

III. Dionysius of Alexandria, A. D. 247, doubts concerning the Book of Revelation, but uses and collates the four Gospels, as of undisputed authority.

IV. But this section may be said to be framed, to introduce to the reader two remarkable passages in Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History ; the first of which declares St. John’s Gospel to be uncontradicted and acknowledged by all. The author then proceeds to

relate the occasions of writing the Gospels, and the reasons for placing St. John's the last, speaking of all four as equal in authority. The second passage is from a chapter, the title of which is 'Of the Scriptures universally acknowledged, and of those that are not such.' He ranks, in the first place, the four Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles of Paul. In the next, the first epistle of John and the first of Peter are to be deemed authentic: after this is placed the Revelation of St. John, concerning which work many opinions have been formed. Of the controverted books, yet well known and generally approved, are the Epistle of James, that of Jude, the second of Peter, and the second and third of John, whether written by the evangelist, or by another of the same name. He then proceeds to reckon up five others not in our canon, as spurious or controverted.

It is manifest from this passage, that the four Gospels and the Acts (with which our concern principally lies) were acknowledged without dispute even by those who raised objections about some other parts of the Scriptures. It is likewise evident that the author was very conversant in the writings of Christians preceding his own times, from which he drew his knowledge of the character and reception of the books in question.

The opinion of Eusebius and his contemporaries appears to have been founded on the testimony of writers then called ancient; and we may observe, that such of the works of those writers as have come down to our times, entirely confirm the judgment, and support the distinction, proposed by Eusebius.

SECTION IX.

Our Historical Books were attacked by the early Adversaries of Christianity, as containing Accounts on which the Religion was founded.

1. Near the middle of the second century, Celsus,

a heathen philosopher, wrote a treatise against Christianity. The work of Celsus is lost; but many passages appear to be very faithfully preserved by Origen, who answered it about fifty years after; and, amongst other reasons for so thinking, is this,—that the objection, as stated by him, from Celsus, is sometimes stronger than his own answer. I think it also probable that Origen, in his answer, has retailed a large portion of the work of Celsus.

1. Celsus, or the Jew whom he personates, says, ‘I could say many things concerning the affairs of Jesus, and those, too, different from those written by the disciples of Jesus; but I purposely omit them.’ On this passage it has been rightly observed, that it is not easy to believe, that if Celsus could have contradicted the disciples in any material point, he would have omitted to do so. It is sufficient, however, to prove that in his time those books were well known, and allowed to be written by the disciples of Jesus.

2. In another passage Celsus accuses the Christians of altering the Gospel, although we cannot perceive that he specified any particular instance, without which the charge is of no value. At all events, it is evident, that although objections were taken by the adversaries of the religion to the integrity of these books, none were made to their genuineness.

3. In a third passage, the Jew of Celsus thus argues: ‘These things we have alleged to you out of your own writings, not needing other weapons.’ Hence it appears that the books, over which he affects to triumph, possessed an authority by which Christians confessed themselves to be bound.

4. That the books to which Celsus refers were no other than our present Gospels, is made out by his allusions to various passages still found in these Gospels, and to the difference in the accounts given of the resurrection by the evangelists, some mentioning two angels at the sepulchre, others only one.

It is very material to remark, that Celsus not only refers to the accounts of Christ contained in the four evangelists, but that he refers to no other; founding none of his objections on any thing delivered in spurious Gospels.

II. What Celsus was in the second century, Porphyry became in the third. His work, which was a large and formal treatise against Christianity, is not extant; but we can gather his objections from Christian writers, who have noticed, in order to answer them; and complete proof remains that Porphyry's animadversions were directed against the contents of our present Gospels and of the Acts, considering that to overthrow them was to overthrow the religion. Speaking to the Christians of St. Matthew, Porphyry calls him 'your evangelist;' he also uses the terms 'evangelists' in the plural number; and it does not appear that he considered any history of Christ, except these, as having authority with Christians.

III. A third great writer against Christianity was the emperor Julian, about a century after Porphyry. It appears, in long extracts transcribed from his work by Cyril and Jerome, that Julian noticed by name Matthew and Luke, in the difference between their genealogies of Christ; that he objected to Matthew's application of the prophecy, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son,' (ii. 15.) and to that of 'a virgin shall conceive;' (i. 23.) that he recited sayings of Christ, and various passages of his history in the very words of the evangelists. By quoting the four Gospels and the Acts, and no other, Julian shows that these were the only historical books received by Christians as authentic memoirs of Christ, of his apostles, and of their doctrines. He discovers also his own judgment of them: expressly stating the early date of these records, he calls them by the names which they now bear, and he no where attempts to question their genuineness.

The argument in favor of the books of the New Testament, from the notice taken of them by the opponents of Christianity, is very considerable, proving that the accounts which Christians had then were the same we have now; that our Scriptures were theirs; that neither Celsus, Porphyry, nor Julian suspected their authenticity or genuineness, or expressed an opinion on this subject different from Christians: and when we consider how much it would have availed them to have cast a doubt on this point, and that they were all men of learning and inquiry, their concession on the subject is extremely valuable; especially in the case of Porphyry, who attacks the prophecy of Daniel on this very ground of spuriousness, and maintains his charge by some far-fetched, but very subtle criticisms. Concerning the writings of the New Testament, no trace of this suspicion is any where to be found in him.

SECTION X.

Formal Catalogues of authentic Scriptures were published, in all of which our present Sacred Histories were included.

This species of evidence comes later than the rest, as it was not natural that catalogues of any particular class of books would appear, until Christian writings became numerous, some claiming titles which did not belong to them, and rendering it necessary to separate books of authority from others. But when it does come, it is very satisfactory; the catalogues, though numerous, and made in distant countries, differing in nothing material, and all containing the four Gospels, without any exception.

I. In the writings of Origen, A. D. 230, there are enumerations of the books of Scripture, in which the four Gospels and the Acts are distinctly specified, and in which no books appear beside those now received.

II. Athanasius, about a century after, delivered a

catalogue of the books of the New Testament, containing our Scriptures, and no others.

III. About twenty years after, Cyril set forth a catalogue of the books of Scripture read in the Jerusalem church, the same as ours, except that the Revelation is omitted.

IV. The council of Laodicea, fifteen years after, delivered an authoritative catalogue of canonical Scripture, the same as ours, with the omission of the Revelation.

V. Catalogues now became frequent. Within thirty years we have them by Epiphanius, by Gregory Nazianzen, by Philaster, bishop of Brescia, and by Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium. All these admit no books besides those now received; and all are, for every purpose of historic evidence, the same as ours.¹

VI. Jerome also, the most learned writer of his age, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament, recognising every book now received, and those alone, with a doubt concerning the epistle to the Hebrews.

VII. In like manner the catalogues of two contemporaries of Jerome, i. e. St. Augustin of Africa, and Rufen, presbyter of Aquileia, are perfect and unmixed; the latter of whom concludes with these remarkable words: 'These are the volumes which the fathers have included in the canon, and out of which they would have us prove the doctrine of our faith.'

SECTION XI.

The above Propositions cannot be predicated of those Books, commonly called Apocryphal Books of the New Testament.

The objection taken from apocryphal writings is not much relied on by scholars. But a knowledge of the

¹ Epiphanius omits the Acts of the Apostles. This must have been an accidental mistake, either in him or some copyist of his work; for he elsewhere expressly refers to this book, and ascribes it to Luke.

truth of the case may be useful to many, who, hearing that spurious Gospels existed in ancient times, may conceive that the present selection was rather an arbitrary or accidental choice, than founded in any certain cause of preference. I observe, therefore,—

I. That beside our Gospels and the Acts, no Christian history, claiming apostolic origin, is quoted by any known writer in the first three centuries; or, if quoted, it is with marks of censure and rejection. If there seem to be any exception to this observation, it is a Hebrew Gospel, circulated under the various titles of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, of the Ebionites, sometimes called of the Twelve, by some ascribed to St. Matthew. This Gospel is once, and only once, cited by Clemens Alexandrinus, in the latter part of the second century: it is also twice mentioned by Origen with marks of discredit; and on this ground the exception stands. But what is more material is, that this Gospel, in the main, agreed with our present Gospel of St. Matthew.

II. Of histories denominated apocryphal, as being of uncertain or no authority, two only are noticed by any author of the first three centuries, without terms of condemnation; the one, a book entitled 'the Preaching of Peter,' quoted repeatedly by Clemens Alexandrinus, A. D. 196; the other, called 'the Revelation of Peter,' on which work the above-mentioned author is said by Eusebius to have written notes. We further add,—1. That there is no evidence that any spurious or apocryphal books existed in the first century, in which all our historical books are proved to have been extant; 2. that these writings were not read in the Christian churches; 3. were not admitted into their volume; 4. do not appear in their catalogues; 5. were not noticed by their adversaries; 6. were not alleged by different parties as of authority in their controversies; 7. were not the subjects,

amongst them, of commentaries, versions, collations, expositions; and, finally, were reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages, with a consent nearly universal.

Although it may be made out by these observations that the books in question never obtained the degree of credit, that can place them in competition with our Scriptures, yet it appears that many such existed in the third and fourth centuries. It is difficult to account for their origin. Perhaps the most probable explication is, that they were in general composed with a view to profit by the sale, and that hence many were adapted to the opinions of particular sects. After all, they were probably more obscure than we imagine. Except the Gospel according to the Hebrews, there is none, of which we hear more than the Gospel of the Egyptians; yet there is reason to believe that Clement of Alexandria, a man of almost universal reading, had never seen it.

It is observable of all the apocryphal Christian writings, that they proceed on the same fundamental history of Christ and his apostles, as that in our Scriptures.

CHAPTER X.

Recapitulation of the preceding Arguments.

The two points which form the subject of our present discussion, are, 1. that the Founder of Christianity, and his immediate followers, passed their lives in labors and sufferings; 2. that they did so in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our Scriptures, and solely in consequence of their belief in them.

The argument by which the first proposition has been maintained, arises from the nature of the undertaking; the character of the persons employed; the opposition of their tenets to the fixed expectations of

their countrymen; their condemnation of all other religions; and their total want of authority or power. This probability is increased by our knowledge of the fate of the Founder, and the cruel treatment of the first converts; both which points are attested by heathen writers, and leave it very incredible that the primitive emissaries, who exercised their ministry amongst those who had destroyed their Master and persecuted their converts, should themselves escape with impunity. The probability however amounts to historical certainty, by the evidence of our own books; by the accounts of one who was the companion of persons whose sufferings he relates; by the letters of the teachers themselves; by predictions of persecutions ascribed to the Founder of the religion, which would not have been inserted in the history, had they not accorded with the event, and which, if false, could only have been so ascribed, because suggested by the event; lastly, by incessant exhortations to fortitude and patience, with an earnestness which must have been suggested by an extraordinary call for their exercise. It is probable also, that both the teachers and converts, in consequence of their profession, took up a new course of life and behavior.

The next great question is, what they did this *for*. That it was for a miraculous story of some kind seems manifest; because, as to the fundamental article, viz. that Jesus was to be received as the Messiah, they could have nothing but miracles to stand on. That the exertions and sufferings of the apostles were for the story we have now is proved by the consideration, that this story is transmitted to us by two of their own number, and by two others personally connected with them, with a particularity and circumstantial information arising from their situation; that each of these books contains enough to prove the truth of the religion; that if any one of them, therefore, be genuine, it is sufficient; that the genuineness, however, of all

is made out, as well by general arguments as by peculiar and specific proofs, viz. by citations from them in writings contiguous to their date; by the regard paid to them by early Christians; by a universal agreement respecting these books, though doubts were entertained concerning others; by contending sects appealing to them; by the admission of their genuineness by the early opponents of the religion; by many formal catalogues published in distant parts of the world; and, lastly, by the absence or defect of these topics of evidence, when applied to other histories of the same subject.

These are strong arguments to prove that the books proceeded from the authors whose names they bear and have always borne. But even supposing that we knew not the writers of the four Gospels; still the fact, that they were received as authentic by the earliest Christians, that they corroborate each other's testimony, and are further confirmed by another contemporary history, which takes up the story where they left it, and which accounts for the rise of changes in the world, the effects of which are felt at this day, and connected with a body of letters written by the apostles themselves, assuming the same general story, and alluding to particular parts of it; with the reflection, that if the apostles delivered any different story, it is lost, and that this oblivion and substitution could not have taken place under such circumstances;—this evidence would suffice to prove, that whoever were the authors of these books, they exhibit the story which the apostles told, and for which they acted and suffered.

If this be so, the religion must be true. These men could not be deceivers. By keeping silence they might have avoided all their sufferings. Would men, in such circumstances, pretend to see what they never saw; assert facts, of which they had no knowledge; go about lying, to teach virtue; and

though convinced of Christ's being an impostor, and witnessing his crucifixion, still persist in carrying on the fraud, and so persist, as to expose themselves, knowingly and for nothing, to danger and death?

PROPOSITION II.

There is not satisfactory evidence, that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain as these are, have passed their lives in dangers and difficulties, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief in such accounts.

CHAPTER I.

Consideration of the Question generally.

I enter on this part of my argument by declaring how far my belief in miracles goes. If the early reformers of the popish church, such as Wickliffe and Luther, or the more recent reformers of the episcopal church, such as Whitfield and Wesley, had undergone a life of dangers and difficulties for the propagation of their tenets, founded, as they alleged, on miracles which these knew had been wrought, and which could not be resolved into a deception on the part of the performer of the miracle, nor a delusion on the part of the witness to it; and if their conduct really had its origin in such accounts, I should have believed them. Or if Howard, the philanthropist, had undertaken his labors and journeys in attestation, and in consequence of a miracle clearly wrought, I should have believed him also. Or if Socrates had professed to perform miracles publicly at Athens; or if his followers had, in attestation of such miracles, hazarded their lives in propagating his doctrines; and

if the knowledge of such pretended miracles had come down to us through the medium of the writings of his friends, received as genuine from that time to the present, I should have believed them likewise : and my belief would be much strengthened, if the doctrines so propagated were conducive to human happiness, but could not be received as true without supernatural interposition ; or, in other words, if the occasion demanded a miraculous interposition, and, the end justified the means. Still more firmly should I believe, if the effects of the story remained ; and, after having wrought a change in the conduct of many at the time when such change could be least expected, it had founded a system of religion and morality in countries the most civilised ; and yet the grounds of my belief would, in none of these cases, have been so strong as the apostles' story presents.

Persons may call this belief credulity ; but before they so call it, they ought to show where the same evidence has proved to be fallacious.

Since, then, the question which we are now to discuss depends on the comparison between the evidence we have to give for our miracles, and what our opponents have to offer for theirs, it is necessary to state certain distinctions we wish to propose, touching points relating—1. to the proofs of the miracles ; and, 2. to the miracles themselves.

Under the first of these heads we lay out of the case—

1. Such accounts of supernatural events as are found in histories, written long posterior to the transactions themselves. Ours is a contemporary history. Hence it cannot be compared with the miraculous history of Pythagoras, who lived five hundred years A. C. written by Porphyry and Iamblichus, who lived three hundred years A. D. In like manner it is distinguished from the history of the prodigies mentioned by Livy, who, from the distance of time since the transactions took place, could know no more of them

than his reader does at present. The same observation applies to the history of miracles said to be done by popish saints ; the narrations of which are attested by certificates exhibited at their canonisation ; a ceremony which seldom took place till a century after their death. The same distinction applies also to the miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, published by Philostratus, who lived about one hundred years after the death of his hero ; and to the extraordinary account of Gregory, *Θαυματουργὸς* (*miracle-worker*), as mentioned by Gregory of Nyssen, who lived 130 years after the subject of his panegyric.

The value of this consideration will be best seen in the history of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the order of Jesuits. In his life, written by one of his companions, and published 15 years after his death, it is distinctly stated that he performed no miracles ; and in the republication of the same life, with corrections, 15 years afterwards, the same silence is preserved as to his non-miraculous powers. But when he had been dead about 60 years, and was to be placed as a saint in the Romish calendar, miracles were, it seems, first attributed to him, and admitted by the church on the slenderest proof.

II. We may lay out of the case all accounts published in one country of what passed in another, where no proof is given that such accounts were admitted in the country where the event is said to have happened. In the case of Christianity, Judea was the scene of the transaction, and the place where the story was first promulgated ; and in these points the history of the Christian miracles differs from the miracles which Philostratus says were done by Apollonius in India ; while no evidence remains to show that the miracles ascribed to him were ever heard of in India. In like manner, the miracles of Francis Xavier, the Indian missionary, with many others of the Romish breviary,

are inadmissible, as being published at a great distance from their pretended scene of action.¹

III. We lay out of the case transient rumors. When an extraordinary story, or even an ordinary one, is first heard, no one can tell whether it be true or false. But if it be confirmed by direct or indirect testimony, and on the faith of such testimony it be received, its character of a transient rumor is changed for that of a stable truth. So it is with the Christian story; which, however extraordinary it might seem to be at first, and therefore not to be received without inquiry; yet, as it was confirmed both by direct and indirect testimony, and admitted on such testimony, it ceased to be a transient rumor, and becomes not less a stable truth, from the miraculous nature of the events recorded.

IV. We may lay out of the case what I call naked history. It has been said, and truly so, that if the miracles of Christianity had been found only in the fragments of Manetho or Berosus, we should pay no regard to them; for if there were no collateral evidence to support the account, it would be undeserving of credit. But this is not our case. The Christian account is supported by collateral evidence relating to the various points already detailed. Now whether such evidence be satisfactory or not, we do not inquire; all we here assert is, that instead of a naked record [such as we find in Philostratus of Apollonius Tyaneus], we possess what is properly an accumulation of evidence.

V. Although a particularity in names, dates, and circumstances be a mark of historical truth, yet as it may be found also in stories not true, we do not insist much on it. Nevertheless, few, I think, can read the circumstantial account of Paul's shipwreck (Acts

¹ Douglas, Criterion of Miracles, p. 84.

xxvii.), without being convinced that the writer was there; nor are the marks of personal knowledge less observable in the account of the cure and examination of the blind man in St. John (chap. ix.). But though particularity may be found in stories not true, still is it a standard to try the probity of the writer, who thus exposes himself to the chance of easier detection, should he have substituted fiction for fact. Of this particularity so many examples present themselves in our histories, that it seems difficult to conceive that they were all imaginary.¹

VI. We lay out of the case such stories of supernatural events, as require an 'otiose' assent; by which I mean, where a story is believed, because we do not take the trouble to inquire into it; and where we are thus idle, because, whether true or false, it requires no change in our habits of thought or actions. Of such kind are stories of the marvellous, connected with the vulgar idea of a ghost; and by which however men may be affected, they are not willing to suffer persecution for their belief in them, because they are indifferent to any question such miracles may pretend to prove. To the story, however, of the Christian miracles, none can be indifferent; since, if true, they settle the question most important for man to know. Besides, they claimed, what other miracles do not, to dissipate prejudices on points where man is most obstinate; for if a Jew took up the story, he found his self-love wounded, as being no longer one of God's favored people; or if a Gen-

¹ 'There is always some truth, where considerable particularities are related; and the two always seem to bear some proportion to each other. Thus there is a great want of the particulars of time, place, and persons, in Manetho's account of the Egyptian Dynasties, Ctesias's of the Assyrian Kings; and agreeably thereto, the accounts have much fiction and falsehood, with little truth: whereas in Thucydides and Cæsar, the particulars of time, place, and persons, are mentioned, so that both are esteemed true to a very great degree.' Hartley, vol. ii. p. 100.

tile, he saw the death blow given to his darling idols. It is not therefore conceivable that either would give up their prejudices in favor of the religion of their fathers, on account of a story, of whose truth they were not convinced. But Christianity did not stop at opinions. It required the converts to change their previous course of life ; a step which they never would have taken, unless they believed the accounts they heard.

If it be said, that a mere promise of a future state would do all this, I answer, that unless the promise were backed by evidence of its truth, it would do no such thing. A set of wandering fishermen, asserting the resurrection of the dead, without giving a proof of it, could produce no effect. Nor would men, as is asserted, easily believe what they anxiously desire ; for such anxiety causes men to doubt rather than to believe. Hence, when Christ's resurrection was first reported to his disciples, they very naturally disbelieved through excess of joy.

VII. We lay out of the case accounts, which are in unison with opinions already formed. Thus, the miracles said to be done in popish countries, as they chime in with the opinions of papists, cannot be compared with those done, as the Christian miracles were, in opposition to popular prejudices. In the former case, though men may receive the miraculous account, and even act and suffer in the cause which the miracle is meant to support, yet they will not so act and suffer for the miracle itself, but for some previous persuasion, which the miracle merely confirms, and, so confirming, is believed without examination. In the moral, as in the natural world, it is change which requires a cause. Now such a change was effected by the real miracles of Christ, but was not effected by the pretended miracles of subsequent ages : the former did, the latter did not, convert persons from previous prejudices. They who acted and suffered in the cause of Christianity, did so for the miracles, uninfluenced

by any previous persuasion, for none such existed. When Jesus first set up his claim, he had not one follower. His miracles alone gave birth to his sect.

Nothing similar can be asserted of heathen and popish marvels; for there the religion existed before the marvels said to be done, and naturally so; because frauds may be mixed up with a religion during its progress, which cannot be so done at its commencement, in consequence of the greater opposition to which it is exposed in the latter than in the former case.

But it will, perhaps, be said, that to propagate a religion, supported by pretended miracles, proves nothing as to its truth; for such propagation, accompanied even by suffering, may be done at any time. But we ask, has it ever been done [except in the case of Mahomet, of which we shall hereafter speak more fully]? and when, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, some French prophets ventured to allege miraculous evidence in their favor, was not their cause immediately ruined by such temerity? Or can any of the religions of Rome, Siam, or China, offer a single miracle, as a test of their truth, that happened previous to the establishment of such religion?

Connected with this distinction between miracles that do and those that do not chime in with previous opinions, is the subject of pious frauds. In such cases the doctrine propagated is believed to be true, though the miracle itself, the object of the fraud, is known to be false. But such conduct, the result of a previous persuasion, is not to be found in the apostolic history. If the apostles did not believe the miracles, they could not believe the religion; and not believing, could have no motive to act such pious frauds.

Again, if it be said that the miracles were pretended, with a view to propagate a religion, which, whether true or false, was, politically speaking, believed to be useful; I reply, that the whole history of

the primitive Christians proves, that political considerations never entered into their heads; nor, in fact, can any reason be assigned for their conduct, supposing their story to be false; for, if they were bad men, why take so much pains to inculcate virtue; if good, why propagate a string of lies?

The preceding distinctions will enable us to appreciate the credit due to the evidence for a miraculous story: the following relate rather to the miracles themselves:—

1. That is not a miracle, which can be resolved into a 'false perception.' Hence the visions of St. Anthony, of Lord Herbert, as described by himself, of Colonel Gardiner, as related by Doddridge, are not miraculous interpositions, but merely symptoms of a disordered mind, affected by certain impressions on its senses. Nor is this exception taken merely to meet the present case: for the marks by which such delusive sensations are separated from others not delusive, are sufficiently distinct: for the former are, what the latter are not, confined to one or two senses the most easily deceived, such as vision and hearing. The object is never touched. Besides, they almost always rest on the evidence of a single witness, and naturally so; because, being the result of a distempered imagination, it is hard to conceive that two minds should exist affected simultaneously with the same delusion. Lastly, such marvels are momentary, that is, produce no permanent effects. The appearance of a ghost, or the hearing of a supernatural sound, is a momentary miracle, and does not, like the curing of the blind, or restoring the dead to life, produce permanent and sensible effects; where, though the miraculous cure be momentary, the proof of the miracle remains. Now, this permanency of effect negatives the supposition of delusion; and of this kind are most of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. Thus, when Lazarus

was raised from the dead, he did not merely move, and speak, and die again, or disappear, but returned to his home, and was visited by many Jews as an object of curiosity, and giving the Jews so much uneasiness by his presence, that their rulers thought of destroying him.¹ No delusion can account for this. The French prophets, mentioned above, gave out that one of their teachers would rise again, but none said they actually saw him again alive. On the other hand, in the case of the blind man restored to sight,² and of the cripple cured by Peter,³ both appeared to testify in person the miracle wrought in their behalf, when its truth was questioned. In neither, therefore, of these instances could there be any delusion in the subjects of the miracle, nor in the witnesses; for the malady and cure were equally notorious.

There are other cases of a mixed nature, where, though the principal miracle be, as in the preceding; momentary, its effects are still permanent. Thus, in St. Paul's conversion,⁴ the sudden light, the vision, and voice were momentary; but his blindness for three days was an effect not transitory; the communication made to Ananias in another place, and by a separate vision, together with Ananias's consequent discovery of Paul's condition, and his cure by the imposition of hands, are circumstances which give to the miracle a permanent character, and prevent its being classed with delusions. The same may be said of Peter's vision, and of its connexion with what was imparted to Cornelius, and of the message sent consequently from the one to the other.

But, in addition to the risk of delusion, there is a greater room for imposture in momentary miracles, from the difficulty of sifting at the time all the circumstances of the story. This applies particularly to the pretended miraculous appearance of Castor and

¹ John xii. 10.

² John ix.

³ Acts iii. 2.

⁴ Acts ix.

Pollux, in the battle fought by Posthumus with the Latins on the lake Regillus. There is no doubt that Posthumus spread the report of such an appearance. None were able to deny it, while it was said to last; and while few could say, during the bustle of the battle, what they did or did not see, fewer still would deny it after the battle was over.

Amongst the phenomena of false perceptions, I have studiously omitted all notice of secret and internal intimations, because their existence must, from want of external evidence, be known only to the parties themselves.

II. Nor is it necessary to compare with the Scripture miracles what may be called 'tentative' miracles, that is, where, out of many miracles attempted, a few only succeed; and which are therefore remembered, while all the unsuccessful are suppressed. This observation applies to the oracles and auguries of the ancients, to the cures wrought by the relics of saints, and to the boasted efficacy of the king's touch in the cure of the king's evil; in all of which we hear only of the successful cases. But no such solution can apply to the miracles of the Gospel, where Christ is never said to have attempted many cures, and to have succeeded only in a few; on the contrary, whenever he pronounced the word the effect followed.¹ He did not, indeed, choose, when called on, to heal all that were sick, fortifying his refusal by the example of Elias and Eliseus,² but more probably intending to show, that as divine interposition could not always be expected, man must put his faith on a few decisive proofs. In the cure of the man with a palsy,³ and of

¹ Only one instance can be produced in which the disciples of Christ attempted a cure, but were unable to perform it. But as the patient was afterward healed by Christ himself, the whole transaction was probably intended to display the superiority of Christ above all who presumed to perform miracles in his name. See Matth. xvii. 14. Mark ix. 14. Luke ix. 33.

² Luke iv. 25.

³ Mark ii. 3.

the other with a withered hand,¹ there was nothing tentative, nor to be explained by the power of accident; and in like manner, many other miracles, such as walking on the sea, and feeding the five thousand with the barley-loaves and fish, are of a nature to negative the supposition of a fortunate experiment.

III. We may dismiss from the question of comparison all accounts, where, though the fact may be true, it is still doubtful whether a miracle was wrought. Thus the story of the marvellous obstructions to Julian's rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem; of the sudden shower that extinguished the fire into which the Scriptures were thrown during Diocletian's persecution; and of the annual liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, are all doubtful, not as facts, but as miracles. The same may be said of the extraordinary cures of diseases, where the nervous system is chiefly affected; for there both the disease and remedy depend on the imagination; or where we read of the casting out evil spirits, in which there is great room for deception. Did the pretended miracles tell us that the blind recovered their sight, or the deaf their hearing, they would have had something to oppose to the Scripture miracles. At present, all that we read of in the more recent accounts of such interpositions, may be easily explained by referring to the operation of natural causes, now known to many, but known then only to the few, initiated into the craft of miracle-workers.

IV. Equally removed from our question are the accounts, where, though a part may be true, the remainder may be resolved into exaggeration. This solution, however applicable to other marvellous stories, cannot apply to the miracles of the Gospels. Total fiction will account for any marvel. Until, therefore, the Gospel history be proved a total fiction, we

¹ Matth. xii. 10.

must believe that the feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, or the raising of Lazarus, were miracles done really to the very letter; for if these were only partially true, no exaggeration of a natural event would account for the part not true. Such are the exceptions that may be fairly taken to the several miracles put sometimes in competition with those recorded in Scripture. But though some of the last mentioned fall within the exceptions here assigned, still, as they are united to others, to which no such exceptions can be taken, they will obtain a credit from their union, which, if standing singly, they could not fairly claim. Thus, although the visions of St. Paul are not distinguishable from the visions of other persons; yet, as the truth of St. Paul's history, and his power to work miracles, is confirmed by other evidence, the credit thus given to one part of his assertions proved to be true, is fairly given to such other part also, as would otherwise seem doubtful. The same observation applies to Christ's transfiguration,¹ to the voice from heaven,² and to some others of the same kind; all of which must rest their reception, not on their own credibility taken separately, but as parts of a whole story; which, if proved to be true, will stamp a credit on these also; since few, who admit the rest, will reject these. Well, therefore, do our books record a variety³ of miracles done by Christ and the apostles in different places and on different occasions; for thus alone are we precluded from applying to the many the grounds of disbelief, which the solution of a few would lead to.

¹ Matth. xvii. 1.

² John xii. 28.

³ See John ii.; Matth. xiv. 15; Mark vi. 35; Luke ix. 12; John vi. 5; Matth. xiv. 25; Matth. viii. 26; Luke viii. 24; Matth. iii. 16; John xii. 28; Matth. xvii. 1-8; Mark ix. 2; Luke ix. 28; 2 Peter i. 16, 17; Matth. ix. 18; Mark v. 22; Luke viii. 41; Luke vii. 14; John xi.

CHAPTER II.

Consideration of some specific Instances.

[Such are the exceptions which may be fairly taken against the miracles, to be put in comparison with those recorded in Scripture.] Nevertheless, they, with whom we argue, have a right to select their own examples, unshackled by any such restrictions. The instances adduced by Hume, the best, probably, his information could supply, are the following:—

I. The cure of a blind and of a lame man of Alexandria by the emperor Vespasian, as related by Tacitus;

II. The restoration of the limb of an attendant in a Spanish church, as told by Cardinal de Retz; and

III. The cures said to be performed at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, in the early part of the eighteenth century.

I. The first of these alleged miracles is thus related by Tacitus: ‘One of the common people of Alexandria, known to be diseased in his eyes, by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that superstitious nation worship above all other gods, prostrated himself before the emperor, earnestly imploring from him a remedy for his blindness, and entreating that he would deign to anoint with his spittle his cheeks and the balls of his eyes. Another, diseased in his hand, requested, by the admonition of the same god, that he might be touched by the foot of the emperor. Vespasian at first derided and despised their application; but at the earnest supplication of the patients, and the persuasion of his flatterers, he was led to hope for success. He commanded, therefore, an inquiry to be made by the physicians, whether such a blindness and

Paley Evid.

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debility were vincible by human aid. Their report was that in the one the power of vision was not destroyed; in the other the diseased joints might be restored; that it was, perhaps, agreeable to the gods to apply a healing power; that the emperor was elected by divine assistance; and lastly, that the credit of success would be the emperor's, the ridicule of the disappointment would fall on the patients. Vespasian, believing that every thing was in the power of his fortune, and that nothing was any longer incredible, whilst the multitude, which stood by, eagerly expected the event, with a countenance expressive of joy, executed what he was desired to do. Immediately the hand was restored to its use, and his sight returned to the blind man. They who were present relate both these cures, even at this time, when there is nothing to be gained by lying.'¹

Now, though Tacitus wrote this account 30 years after the miracle is said to have been performed, and wrote at Rome of what passed at Alexandria, and wrote also from report; yet I think his testimony sufficient to prove that such a transaction took place, and that a cure was reported to have been effected.

But the whole affair seems to have been a trick concerted between all the parties concerned; for there was every thing to suggest such a scheme, and to facilitate its operation. The miracle was calculated to confer honor on the god Serapis. It was achieved in the midst of the emperor's flatterers, and amongst a populace devoted to his interest, and to the worship of the god; where it would have been treason and blasphemy together to have contradicted the fame of the cure, or even to have questioned it.

The ground for suspicion is further increased by attending to the language of the report of the physicians; for as it appears that no external marks of

¹ Tacit. Hist. lib. iv.

disease were visible, they could be easily counterfeited. The strongest circumstance in its favor is that the first patient was notorious for the disease in his eyes. But that incident might have crept into the story during the interval of thirty years, which passed between the time of the transaction and its narration; or the disorder of his eyes might have been a known fact, but its extent not known. Then with regard to the remark of Tacitus, that the witnesses of those miracles still continued to repeat the story; that proves only their consistency; but does not show, what was requisite to be shown, that when they witnessed it, they believed in it. Still less is there of pertinency in Hume's eulogium on the caution of the historian; for it does not appear that he made any inquiry on the subject, and that after such inquiry he believed it. To bring this pretended miracle into comparison with the miracles of Christ, it ought to have been shown that a private person, in the midst of enemies willing from their prejudices and able from their power to oppose his claims, had performed those cures, and had required the spectators, on the strength of the miracles, to give up their firmest opinions; and that so satisfactory seemed the proof of supernatural power claimed by such party, that many obeyed his call, and sacrificing all worldly good, went about testifying to what they had seen, and with such force of persuasion, as to be able to effect a complete revolution in the religion of the world. But such a case, either in its circumstances or consequences, we do not find in the miracles recorded by Tacitus.

II. The story taken from the Memoirs of Cardinal de Retz is the following:—'In the church of Saragossa, in Spain, the canons showed me a man, whose business it was to light the lamps; telling me that he had been several years at the porch with one leg—I saw him with two.'

This pretended miracle the cardinal did not believe himself ; and if he had, it would have proved nothing, as he made apparently no inquiries on the subject. But even if his researches had proved that the man, who formerly had lost a leg, was then walking with two, the marvel might be solved without a miracle, by merely supposing that an artificial leg had been substituted at a place, where the possibility of such substitution was unknown. Besides, the transaction happened where the prejudices of the people and the power of the priests were willing to admit the imposture as a miracle, and ready to put down those, who might doubt its reality to the disparagement of their national church. [Little, therefore, can be drawn from such a story against the miracles in the New Testament, liable to none of the objections to which the preceding account is exposed.]

III. Of the miracles said to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, the solution is very simple. In all cases, where the disorders arose from a distempered state of the nerves, there the cure was effected by the operation of the imagination ; while such as originated in obstructions were removed by the convulsions, into which the patients were thrown under the influence of various feelings. Nor is this solution made to suit the occasion ; for it appears that something similar was done by the professors of animal magnetism, where, from the report of the French physicians, it appears, that the secret of the art consisted in so working on the imagination of the patients as to produce convulsions ; a remedy which, though an efficacious one, is very uncertain in its operation.

But, granting the preceding solution to be unsatisfactory, still the Parisian miracles are exceptionable, as being—1. tentative, that is, where out of many attempts to cure, only some succeeded ; 2. that the cures

were gradual, and varying in their periods; and, 3. that their effects were temporary.¹

But, without insisting even on these three points of difference between the Parisian and Christian miracles, it appears, that of two cases of blindness one was no cure at all, and the other only such as might be expected from the operation of natural causes.

Thus in the case of the young man, who labored under an inflammation of one eye and had lost the sight of the other, the inflamed eye was relieved, but the blindness of the other remained. The inflammation had before been abated by medicine; and the young man, at the time of his attendance at the tomb, was using a lotion of laudanum. The inflammation, however, after some interval returned. In the other case of the young man, who had lost his sight by the puncture of an awl, and the discharge of the aqueous humor through the wound, the sight, which had been gradually returning, was much improved during his visit to the tomb, probably, in the same degree as the discharged humor was replaced by fresh secretions.

In one material point, the Parisian miracles approached the nearest to the Christian. They had not the power of the priests and the prejudices of the people to back them. They were alleged by one party against the other, and were therefore examined at the time by their adversaries. But though the result of that examination did not prove them all to be impostures, it showed that fraud was mixed up with the story; and hence it is fair to infer that what seemed to be a miracle was in fact only a delusion, successfully practised on persons ignorant of the efficacy of strong spasmodic affections. Finally, the cause of Jansenism, instead of rising, sunk in public estimation, although there was a party prejudiced in favor of the

¹ The reader will find these particulars verified in the detail, by the accurate inquiries of Douglas, bishop of Sarum, in his *Criterion of Miracles*, p. 132, &c.

miracles, [had they been really, what they were pretended to be, divine interpositions.]

Such are the miracles brought forward to destroy the credit due to those related in the New Testament. But were they liable to none of the objections started above, it might still be said, that in no case was the miracle unequivocal; by none have prejudices been overthrown; of none did the credit make its way unsupported by human power; and of none was the belief so strong, as to lead persons to undergo danger in attestation of them.¹

¹ The historian of the Parisian miracles, M. Montgeron, forms an exception. He presented his book (with a suspicion, as it should seem, of the danger of what he was doing) to the king, [who was a Jesuit;] and was shortly afterward committed to prison, from which he never came out. Had the miracles been unequivocal, and had M. Montgeron been originally convinced by them, I should have allowed this exception. It would have stood, I think, alone, in the argument of our adversaries. But, the account which M. Montgeron has himself left of his conversion, shows that his persuasion was not built on external miracles.—‘Scarcely had he entered the churchyard, when he was struck (he tells us) with awe and reverence, having never before heard prayers pronounced with so much ardor and transport as he observed amongst the supplicants at the tomb. On this, throwing himself on his knees, resting his elbows on the tombstone, and covering his face with his hands, he spake the following prayer:—‘O thou, by whose intercession so many miracles are said to be performed, if it be true that a part of thee surviveth the grave, and that thou hast influence with the Almighty, have pity on the darkness of my understanding, and through his mercy obtain the removal of it.’ Having prayed thus, many thoughts (as he saith) began to open themselves to his mind; and so profound was his attention, that he continued on his knees four hours, not in the least disturbed by the vast crowd of surrounding supplicants. During this time, all the arguments which he ever heard or read in favor of Christianity, occurred to him with so much force, and seemed so strong and convincing, that he went home fully satisfied of the truth of religion in general, and of the holiness and power of that person, who (as he supposed) had engaged the divine goodness to enlighten his understanding so suddenly.’—Douglas’s Crit. of Mir. p. 214.

PART II.

AUXILIARY EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

Prophecy.

1. Of the different prophecies of the Old Testament, interpreted by Christian writers to relate to the Gospel history, the most remarkable is the one found in Isaiah LII. and LIII. a writer, who lived seven hundred years before Christ.

The facts, then, on which the argument drawn from prophecy chiefly rests, are incontestable; 1. that the prophecy did precede the event said to be prophesied; and, 2. that the prophet could not by any natural means have foreseen the event.

Nor is it immaterial to observe, 1. that the record of the prophecy has been carefully preserved by those who deny its application; and, 2. that with many attempts to explain it away, none have been made to discredit its authenticity.

With regard to the external evidence of the prophecy, we have to remark, 1. that it is found in a writing not historical, but professedly prophetic; in which the future fortunes of the Jewish nation are depicted, and were in times past believed to be so depicted, as appears from Ecclesiasticus xlviii. 24; and, 2. that, intermixed with no other subject, it is directed to the delineation of only one chain of events.

With regard to the application of the prophecy, all is plain and appropriate, without a double sense or figurative language, but what is intelligible to all. The

local allusions are few and unimportant ; and nothing on the ground of verbal criticism affects either the genuineness of the text or leads to a material difference in its meaning. On this last head, indeed, it appears that the variations of translation bring the prophecy still nearer to its literal completion in the person of Christ, as shown below.¹

But if the prophecy refer in fact to Christ, how, it will be said, happens it that the Jews do not admit such an application ? for that they acknowledge its authenticity has been shown before. We answer, that though the ancient Jews admitted the prophecy in general, as relating to a Messiah, they did not agree with Christians as to the interpretation of its language, asserting that what Christians understand as applicable to Christ alone, is really intended to apply to the whole nation of the Jews, spoken of under the character of a single person. But this interpretation, which does not appear to rest on critical arguments of any weight, labors under great difficulties ; for if the Jewish people be the sufferer, it may be asked, in whose name does the prophet speak, when he says, ‘ he hath borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows ; he was bruised for *our* iniquities, and with his stripes *we* are healed ?’ Again, the words ‘ he was oppressed, yet he opened not his mouth ; and as a sheep before her

¹ Thus what our Bible renders ‘ stricken,’ Lowth translates ‘ judicially stricken :’ and in the clause, ‘ he was taken from prison and from judgment,’ the bishop gives, ‘ by an oppressive judgment he was taken off.’ The meaning of the next words, ‘ who shall declare his generation ?’ are much cleared up by his version ; ‘ his manner of life who would declare ?’ i. e. who would stand forth in his defence ? In the words, ‘ and he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,’ which invert the circumstances of Christ’s passion, Lowth brings out an order perfectly agreeable to the event ; ‘ and his grave was appointed with the wicked, but with the rich man was his tomb.’ Lastly, the words, ‘ by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many,’ are, in the bishop’s version, ‘ by the knowledge of him shall my righteous servant justify many.’

shearers he was dumb,' can refer to no part of Jewish history with which we are acquainted. The mention, too, of the 'grave' and 'tomb' is not very applicable to the fortunes of a nation; and still less can a nation, whose sufferings are voluntary, be said to intercede for the transgressors.

With regard to the remaining prophecies on the same subject, worthy as they all are of attentive consideration, they are here purposely omitted, because their full discussion (and nothing short of that ought to take place) is ill suited to the limits of this work. They are, however, all stated and explained in Bishop Chandler's treatise on the subject. In conclusion, I will only remark, that history presents no other person but Christ to whom the prophecy can apply; and as such application can scarcely be the effect of chance, it is not too much to attribute it to design.

II. The second head of argument from prophecy relates to Christ's prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related in nearly the same terms by Luke xxi. 5—25. Matth. xxiv. and Mark xiii. and to which anticipated event a prophetic allusion is also made in Luke xix. 41.

Of the general agreement of these predictions with the event, when Jerusalem was taken by Vespasian, thirty-six years after Christ's death, no doubt can remain, and little as regards even the details of the transaction and prophecy, when compared together. The only question is, whether the prophecy did or did not precede the event? Now, this question will be best decided by considering—

1. That although the precise year when the Gospels were first published is not known, yet they were certainly published before the destruction of Jerusalem.¹

2. That this assertion is supported by the probability arising from the course of human life. Jerusalem

¹ See Le Clerc, Dissert. iii. de Quat. Evang. No. vii. p. 54.

was destroyed in A.D. 70. Now, of the three evangelists, even the youngest was probably not much younger than Christ himself: they must, therefore, if living at the capture of Jerusalem, have been nearly seventy years old, and no reason has been assigned why they should defer writing their histories so long.

3. That if the prophecy had been written subsequent to the events, it is probable the writers, in recording the event, would have said something about the completion of the prophecy, as Luke did, when, after relating the denunciation of a dearth by Agabus, he adds, 'which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.'¹ I admit that an impostor, who wished his readers to believe that his book was written before the event, would have suppressed such intimation carefully; and I do not, therefore, insist on this objection, except so far as it is coupled with another, that they no where pretend to have written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, which a fraudulent purpose would, I think, have led them to do. If, then, they did really write the prophecy after the event, they have exhibited, in acts both of omission and commission, a degree of cunning at variance with their general character.

4. That, if the prophecy were fabricated after the event, the advice which Christ gave² to his followers to save themselves by flight, is not easily accounted for. The Christians, at the siege of Jerusalem, either did or did not attempt to escape. If they did, they must have had the prophecy amongst them; if they did not, it was an absurd fiction on the part of the writer, to put a prediction into the mouth of Christ, which he himself knew, from subsequent events, the persons, to whom it was addressed, had totally disregarded. But this absurdity, it may be said, may be accounted for by supposing that the writer merely

¹ Acts xi. 28.

² Luke xxi. 20. and Matth. xiv. 18.

adopted a traditional prediction. But even in this case the tradition places the prediction prior to the event, which is the point we wish to establish.

5. That if the prophecies had been composed after the event, they would have been more definite as to the time, while the names or description of the enemy and their leader would have been more clearly told. Thus, in the counterfeited prophecies of the Sibylline oracles, and of the twelve patriarchs, we find mere transcripts of history moulded into a prophetic form.

It has been objected, that the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is so mixed up with expressions which relate to the last day, as to lead the reader to believe that the two events would happen at nearly the same time. To this I reply, that if it be proved that Jesus did really foretell the destruction of Jerusalem, it matters not whether such prediction be or be not united with the prediction of another event which has not come to pass, and which was expected to happen only in consequence of an ambiguity arising from the mode of narrating the two predictions, without a due attention to the order of the events.

CHAPTER II.

The Morality of the Gospel.

In stating the morality of the Gospel as an argument for its truth, I admit, 1. that the teaching of morality was not the design of revelation; and, 2. that morality cannot be the subject of any discovery properly so called.

1. The real business of a revelation is to establish the proof of a future state of reward and punishment; and thus to supply motives, not rules, for the conduct of life. The rules men can and do find out for themselves; but they want motives for virtue sufficiently strong to bear up against the allurements of vice. Now such a motive can be found only in the assu-

rance of a future state ; and as such an assurance can be furnished by revelation alone, its necessity and design are shown at once ; and thus, though morality may form a part of the means, it cannot be the whole purpose of a revelation.

2. Morality cannot be the subject of a discovery similar to such as we find in physics ; because in the latter case we have to do with the properties of things, which may be known to the discoverer alone ; but in the former, with the qualities of actions, which cannot be concealed on account of the effects they produce. Hence, as soon as a certain good or ill effect is seen to arise from a certain act, we assign to such act a definite value, and frame our rules with reference to the known effects of such act ; and though, in the formation of these rules, there is no place for discovery, there is ample room for the exercise of prudence.

But though morality cannot be the design of a revelation, it is fair to state that the morality of the Gospel is so extraordinary, as to warrant a belief of its being something more than of human origin ; or, at all events, that it is founded on neither fraud nor folly.

This peculiarity of the Gospel morality will be best seen by considering, 1. the things taught ; and, 2. the manner of teaching.

1. Under the first head, whatever can be well said has been best said by Soame Jenyns, who, in his ' *Internal Evidence of Christianity*,' has made out satisfactorily the two propositions following :—

1. That the Gospel omits some qualities, which have usually engaged the admiration of mankind, but which are, in reality, prejudicial to human happiness.

2. That the Gospel has brought forward some virtues, which possess the highest intrinsic value, but which have been held in general contempt.

Of these propositions the first is exemplified by an appeal to the value set on patriotism, pride, and active

courage; and the second by a reference to the contempt felt for a person patient under suffering, and ready to forgive.

The fact is, mankind is made up of two different sets of characters, the very opposite in all their feelings and acts, the violent and the meek; and while the former has been ever the favorite of mankind, the latter is described as the favorite of Christ, whose morality is peculiar, if not original, in recommending non-resistance to the very verge, as some have thought, of good sense, in his desire to separate the hero of this world from the saint of the next; a separation which Soame Jenyns has shown to be as marked as it is useful, and demanding (what the difficulty to require and sustain such a character well deserves) the tribute of that admiration, now foolishly lavished on its opposite.

The proofs of his argument rest on the fact, that if this meek disposition were universal, there would be peace on earth and good-will amongst men; while the world could not so much as hold a universal mass of violent spirits, amongst whom a quarrel once begun could never end; for every retaliation would be a fresh injury, till death or distance separated the parties for ever.

Imbued with the spirit and aware of the value of this meekness of disposition, our Saviour constantly inculcated the same on his disciples, as often as occasions occurred (and they were not few), of checking a violence of deportment so natural to man, but so much at variance with the character of a Christian.

But though this peculiarity in Christian ethics argues a wisdom far beyond what the person who delivered such a doctrine could have exhibited naturally, still it must not be forgotten that the line of conduct here recommended has reference to a man only in his individual character. For in cases where the public welfare is concerned, if the doctrine of non-resistance were practised universally, and so be pro-

ductive of general mischief, the rule would be carried beyond its proper limits; and being inapplicable, need not be followed.¹

II. A second argument drawn from the morality of the New Testament, is in the stress laid there on the regulation of the thoughts; a consideration connected with the preceding, inasmuch as the one relates to the malicious, the other to the voluptuous passions of our nature; 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts—These are the things which defile a man.' *Matth. xv. 19.* See also *Matth. xxiii. 25—28.*

That the propensities of our nature require some control, is evident; but till Christ came, none had decided the control of thought to be essential. With him, however, internal purity is every thing; and wisely so: for a moral system which prohibits actions, but puts no restraint on the thoughts, [destroys merely the fruit of sin, but leaves the root untouched.]

III. The third argument drawn from the morality of the Christian institution, relates to the peculiar manner in which our duty to God and our neighbor is inculcated.

On the first of these points it may be observed, that, had a moralist been required to give a short yet comprehensive rule of life, he could not have done

¹ The above seems to be the real meaning of Paley in the following very obscure passage: 'It is sufficiently apparent, that the precepts we have cited, or rather the disposition which these precepts inculcate, relate to personal conduct from personal motives; to cases in which men act from impulse, for themselves, and from themselves. When it comes to be considered, what is necessary to be done for the sake of the public, and out of a regard to the general welfare (which consideration, for the most part, ought exclusively to govern the duties of men in public stations), it comes to a case to which the rules do not belong. This distinction is plain; and if it were less so, the consequence would not be much felt: for it is very seldom that, in the intercourse of private life, men act with public views. The personal motives, from which they do act, the rule regulates.'

'This preference of the patient to the heroic character, is a peculiarity in the Christian institution, and an argument of wisdom, much beyond the natural situation of the person who delivered it.'

better than to advise a constant reference to God's will, and a constant attention to man's happiness; for by the former direction he would suggest the only motive, which can act steadily at all times; and by the latter he would best correct man's selfishness, the besetting sin of our nature, by inculcating a feeling of considerateness towards all our fellow creatures.

Nor does it detract from the merit of these precepts; urged so strenuously by Christ,¹ to learn that they exist in the Mosaic code; for his selection of them out of a mass of statutes, and his insisting on them as the sum and substance of every duty, is an act scarcely less meritorious than their first promulgation would have been. Such too were, doubtless, the feelings of his disciples, who constantly² refer to these precepts as being the distinctive rule of Christian conduct. It is the theme of all their exhortations; the beginning and end of their morality; and the point from which their details of duties set out, and to which they all return.

That this temper of mind continued to animate for a time the Christian converts is attested by Clemens Romanus,³ the earliest of the apostolic fathers; through the whole of whose Epistle to the Corinthians the meekness of the Christians is conspicuously displayed, while he calls to the remembrance of the church its former character for humility, kindness, and long-suffering.

The same principle is mixed up with all the writings of that age; insomuch that more quotations are to be found in the apostolic fathers of texts which relate to this point, than to any other.⁴

IV. A fourth distinguishing feature of Christian morality, is the exclusion of all regard to the opinion of the world.

¹ See Matth. xxii. 35. xix. 16. and Luke x. 27.

² See Rom. xiii. 9. Galat. v. 14. 1 John iv. 21. 1 Peter i. 22.

³ See Abp. Wake's Translation, c. ii. 53, 54.

⁴ See Polycarp, Epist. ad Phil. c. 2. 11. and Ignat. Epist.

Hence, we are taught neither to do alms¹ nor to pray,² with a view to gain the world's applause, but to please God; and the same rule of course applies to other virtues.

But neither here nor elsewhere is the pursuit of men's approbation condemned as a vice; it is merely said that the desire of fame must not be the motive of virtue. Hence, in cases where publicity may advance a virtuous design, a good man will, so far from avoiding, court it, as the most efficacious mode of bringing his design to bear.

This exclusion of a regard for reputation does not affect so much the duties to be taught as the manner of teaching them; and marks most conspicuously the superiority which a spiritual teacher possesses over a worldly one in the strength of the motives, which the former can, but the latter cannot, urge. For while the worldly moralist can expatiate merely on the good and evil arising from a line of conduct deserving of praise or censure in the eyes of men; the spiritual teacher can direct our attention to acts, that are pleasing in the eye of God, and in which virtue will be found to be its own reward.

Having thus detailed what Jesus taught, we have now to consider his manner of teaching.

Peculiar as this was, it was the best adapted to his peculiar situation. His lessons were not lengthy and formal treatises on morals, but comprised in short and pithy precepts, and unaccompanied by the proofs which they seldom wanted, or by the limitations which precepts generally require. This method, though little suited to a philosopher of old, and to be imitated still less by a modern moralist, was peculiarly adapted to the situation in which Christ was placed. As a messenger from God, he wisely rested the truth of his lessons on his own authority.³ His object was, therefore, to pro-

¹ Matth. vi. 6.

² Ibid.

³ See Matth. v. 34. 'I say unto you,' &c.

duce an impression resulting from the idea of his power, rather than a conviction, the effect of his reasonings. Now, to produce this impression, nothing could be so efficacious as a repetition of maxims, strong from their native simplicity, and earnestly urged as the best proof of the value he set on them. Besides, his ministry, whether of one or three years, was short, compared with his work; and as, during this period, he had many places to visit, and various audiences to address, he must have wanted time, even had he the inclination, in the midst of interruptions from the zeal of his followers, and the persecutions of his foes, to do more than give concise rules of duty.

This is particularly exemplified in the sermon on the mount,¹ than which nothing could have been better adapted to the situation of himself and hearers, although a more systematic and argumentative discourse would probably have been, under different circumstances, pronounced.

In this mode of instruction, which depends not on arguments, but authority, the rules will naturally be given in positive terms, and the more absolute, as they may have to contend with general propensities. It is further to be remarked, that such expressions as 'If any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,' are intended, though apparently specific precepts, to be descriptive rather of disposition than of acts. This is evident from considering that he, who should act up to the letter of the injunction, would act morally wrong; while he, who should adopt its spirit, would take the best method for improving his disposition by cherishing a feeling of forbearance in general.

¹ Lardner thought that this discourse was made up of what Christ had said at different times and occasions, several of which are noticed by St. Luke. I can perceive no reason for this opinion. I believe that our Lord delivered this discourse at one time and place, in the manner related by St. Matthew, and that he repeated the same rules at different times, as occasion suggested.

If it be said that this general forbearance is unattainable, I answer, so is all perfection; and yet a moralist would not do right in recommending a rule, that would warrant an imperfect line of conduct.

But whatever objection may be raised against such absolute rules, as being liable to misapplication, it may be safely asserted that our Saviour's precepts can never be so mistaken as to do harm. Thus, though a hundred cases might be stated, where the rule 'to do as we would be done by,' might, if taken literally, be misapplied; yet in not one of the hundred could a person be so misled, as to do mischief. In like manner, though the extreme of forbearance is recommended in the precept, 'to forgive a brother though he offend thee seventy times seven,' still it does not appear that the Christian world has suffered from the excess of forbearance, arising from a literal application of the precept. The preceding observations will enable us to understand that our Saviour neither was nor pretended to be a moral teacher, except so far as such a character chimed in with the design of his mission, to give in his own person an assurance of the life to come.¹

In another point connected with his manner of teaching, must be mentioned the parables of the New Testament; which, for the choice of subjects, and the structure of the narrative; for the aptness of illustration, and their simple pathos, may be compared with the best productions of human genius. The Lord's prayer is without a rival, for the real importance of the

¹ Some appear to require in the books, which profess to deliver a religious system, directions for every case of duty that may arise. This, say they, is necessary to a perfect revelation, whose object is the regulation of human conduct. Now, how prolix, and yet how incomplete and unavailing, such an attempt must have been, is proved by the Mussulman religion; whose institutes of civil law, regulating the minutest questions which come under the cognisance of the magistrate, are embodied in a code, containing not less than seventy-five thousand traditional precepts. See Hamilton's Translation of Hedaya, or Guide.

petitions it contains, applicable to all sorts and conditions of men ; for the solemnity of the thoughts, and for the brevity, without the obscurity, of the words.

What, then, are we to infer from the preceding account ? Was our Saviour's wisdom that of a philosopher, concealed in the garb of a carpenter's son ? Or did some of the early Christians of taste and education compose the pieces ascribed to Christ ? This was impossible, at least incredible ; for, judging from the specimens left us of the writings of the earliest Christians, none were equal to the task : and how little qualified the Jews were to assist in the undertaking, may be guessed at from such works as the Talmud ; in the whole of which we find nothing but absurdity, whenever the authors desert the Holy Scriptures.

There is still another view in which our Lord's discourses may be considered, that is, in their negative character ; not in what they contain, but what they omit.

1. They omit all positive descriptions of the invisible world, and are content to describe the future happiness of the good, and the misery of the bad, in terms which are and were intended to be merely metaphorical. Hence Christ's studious evasion of the question, when asked of which husband the woman would be, when in heaven, the wife, who, when on earth, had married seven husbands ? and his cautious reply, that ' there is no marrying in heaven.' This reserve is the more remarkable, because it repels the suspicion of enthusiasm, which is wont to expatiate with a wild particularity on such, above all other subjects ; and as it is a topic which is always listened to with eagerness, teachers, whose purpose is to draw attention, are sure to be full of it. The Koran of Mahomet is half made up of it. 2. Our Lord not only enjoined no austerities as absolute duties, but even recommended none as claiming a higher degree of divine favor. Compare,

in this respect, Christianity as it came from Christ, with the same religion after it fell into other hands; with the extravagant merit soon ascribed to celibacy, solitude, and voluntary poverty; with the rigors of an ascetic, and the vows of a monastic life; the hair shirt, the watchings, the midnight prayers, the silence, the gloom and mortification of religious orders, and of those who aspired to religious perfection. 3. Our Saviour uttered no impassioned devotion. There was no heat in his piety, or in the language in which he expressed it. The Lord's prayer is a model of calm devotion. His words in the garden are unaffected expressions, of a deep indeed, but sober piety. His was not that emotion of spirits, observable in enthusiasts; in whose meetings how different is what we hear from what we read of, not in their doctrine (for with that we have not any concern), but in their manner, so alien to the sobriety, sense, and strength of our Lord's discourses! 4. It is usual for man to substitute fervency in a particular case for general good conduct. But, though it is politic for the leader of a sect to indulge this misplaced zeal, Christ notices it merely to condemn it, in his well-known words, 'Not every one that saith Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven,¹ &c.' If, then, instead of courting popularity by a sacrifice of principle, he reproved the attachment of followers, exhibited with more zeal than discretion, he has given at least a proof of his sincerity and judgment, [at variance with the character of an enthusiast or impostor.] 5. Nor did Christ fall in with any of the prejudices of his country or education. Bred up a Jew, and under an institution the most full of forms and ceremonies, he promulgated a religion the most free from rituals of any

¹ Matth. vii. 21.

known to exist. This conduct was, however, not dictated by the enthusiasm that sweeps away all external ordinances, but a soundness of judgment, that saw an evil, and knew how to cure it. Hence, his censure of all overstrained, and, perhaps, pretended regard of the sabbath, and of the pharisaic scrupulosity of paying tithes, accompanied with a neglect of charity. But though his censure was directed against an abuse, resulting from a too strict application of certain laws, he objects not to their use; and thus develops the character of a cool philosopher, rather than of a hot-headed enthusiast. 6. Nor does he, as the Jewish doctors did, quibble about an enactment; but in all his principles, even those derived from the Mosaic code, we find neither subtilty nor sophistry; every thing is plain and straight-forward. 7. The national temper of the Jews was narrow-minded and intolerant; but in Jesus we see a feeling of universal charity. Hence, not a little surprise was probably felt by the former, when they heard the latter declare, that many should come from the East and West, and sit down in the kingdom of heaven; while the self-called favorites of God would be rejected. Lastly, amongst the negative qualities of the religion, as promulgated by Christ, may be reckoned its complete withdrawal from politics and priestcraft. Christ's declaration, that 'his kingdom was not of this world;' his evasion of the question, whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar; his declining to exercise the office of a criminal judge in the case of the woman taken in adultery, are all intelligible significations of our Saviour's sentiments on this head. And with respect to politics, or discussions concerning different forms of government, Christianity declines every question on the subject. To all governments the Gospel is equally applicable; inasmuch as, 1. it tends to make men virtuous, and, therefore, easier to govern; 2. it states obedience to be not merely a submission to force, but a duty of con-

science ; 3. it induces dispositions favorable to public tranquillity, as a Christian's chief care is to pass quietly through this world to a better ; and 4. it prays for communities of every description, with a fervency proportioned to their influence on human happiness. All which is just as it should be. Had there been more in Scripture convertible to political purposes, the worst use would have been made of it, on whichever side it seemed to lie.

Such, then, is the view in detail of the Christian religion, as seen on various sides, relative to its morality, and the character and conduct of its founder ; and, if the view be correctly drawn, none can refuse to acknowledge the probity and good sense of those to whom it owes its origin, and to confess that some regard is due to their testimony, when they declare that it proceeded from God.

Nor is this all that the inherent qualities of the Christian religion may be said to prove. It would have been very extraordinary, come from whom it might ; from the person from whom it did come, it is exceedingly so. Who and what was its founder ? A Jew, the son of a carpenter, living with his parents in a remote province of Palestine, till his appearance as a teacher of a new religion. He had no master to instruct him, and no books besides the Old Testament to read ; he visited no cities where schools of philosophy were established, and therefore could know no more of their lessons than others of his equals in life ; and supposing it to be true (which it is not) that all his morality can be found in Greek and Roman writers, their writings were sealed works to him ; and, if known at all in Palestine, could not have been so known, as to enable him to form out of them the groundwork of his new religion.

Who were his coadjutors during his life, and the apostles of the religion after his death ? A few fishermen on the lake of Tiberias, as uneducated as himself,

and equally incapable of framing a code of morality. Suppose the mission real, all is easily accounted for; the inaptitude of the characters to the undertaking no longer surprises us; but without reality, it is difficult to explain how such a system should proceed from such persons.

The preceding points are, perhaps, all that can be considered as really arguments; but the following considerations are not undeserving of notice.

1. The character of Christ is a part of the morality of the Gospel; a character so faultless, that, as Origen says, 'none had dared to charge Jesus with an intemperance;'¹ nor did an imputation against his chastity appear for five hundred years after his birth. Some stain pollutes the morals or the morality of almost every teacher. Zeno the stoic, and Diogenes the cynic, fell into the foulest impurities; of which Socrates was more than suspected. Solon forbade unnatural crimes to slaves. Lycurgus tolerated theft as a part of education. Plato recommended a community of women. The elder Cato was remarkable for the ill usage of his slaves; the younger gave up the person of his wife. One loose principle is found in the writings of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus, in the recommending to their disciples a compliance with the religion, and with the religious rites of every country into which they came.

2. In the histories of Jesus Christ, we find not only the absence of the proofs of all vice, but the existence of virtues, mentioned not directly, but to be inferred from incidental notice; such as, 1. of devotion in his retirement to solitary prayer; in his earnest addresses to his Father, more particularly before the raising of Lazarus from the dead; and his behavior in the garden, on the last evening of his life: 2. of his humility, in his constant reproof of contentions for superiority: 3. of his

¹ Epist. Cels. iii. 6.

benignity, in the tears he shed over his falling country, and on the death of his friend ; in his noticing of the widow's mite ; in his parables of the good Samaritan, of the ungrateful servant, and of the Pharisee and publican : 4. of his mildness, in his rebuke of the zeal of his disciples at the Samaritan village ; in his prayer for his enemies at the moment of his suffering. Nor is his prudence less discerned in his withdrawing from the first symptoms of tumult, and in his declining all interference with the civil and legal affairs of the country, as in the case of the woman caught in adultery, and in his refusal to interpose his decision about a disputed inheritance ; in the solution of the difficulty concerning the future state of a woman who had married seven brothers ; and in his reply to those, who demanded from him an explanation of the authority by which he acted, when he in turn propounded a question to them, surrounded by the very difficulties into which they were insidiously endeavoring to draw him.

Our Saviour's lessons, moreover, touch on the most interesting topics of human duty and of human meditation ; on the principles by which the decisions of the last day will be regulated ; on the supreme importance of religion ; on penitence, self-denial, watchfulness, placability, confidence in God, the value of spiritual worship, and in the necessity of moral obedience to the spirit of the law.

The New Testament offers also the best and shortest rules of life, or description of virtue, as ' Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this ; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.'¹

Further, the relative duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of Christian teachers and their flocks, of governors and their subjects, are set forth by St. Paul, not indeed

¹ James i. 27.

with the copiousness, the detail, or the distinctness of a moralist, but with the leading rules and principles in each ; and, above all, with truth and authority.

Lastly, the whole volume of the New Testament is replete with piety ; with, what were almost unknown to heathen moralists, devotional virtues, the most profound veneration of the Deity, an habitual sense of his bounty and protection, a firm confidence in the final result of his counsels and dispensations, a disposition to resort, on all occasions, to his mercy, for the supply of human wants, for assistance in danger, for relief from pain, and for the pardon of sin.

CHAPTER III.

The Candor of the Writers of the New Testament.

This candor consists in their notice of many circumstances, which no writer would have inserted, had his object been to present the story in the most unexceptionable form.

Of this fairness the account given of Christ's resurrection is a prominent example ; where it is stated by all the evangelists, that Christ appeared, as Peter says, ' not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.'¹ Now, as they might as easily have said that Christ appeared after his resurrection to foes as well as friends, they would scarcely have thus limited his appearance to the latter, had their aim been, not to tell the real truth, but to render their narrative liable to the fewest objections possible.

This argument respecting the candor of the evangelists deserves the more notice, as Gibbon² has vindicated the genuineness of the Koran by a similar argument.

Other instances of honesty on the part of the evan-

¹ Acts x. 40.

² Vol. ix. c. 50. not. 96.

gelists, narrating what they knew would make against them, may be seen in the account of John the Baptist's message;¹ in that of the apostasy of Judas,² and of the defection of some of the early disciples;³ a circumstance which no writer, whose object was to disguise facts, would have noticed. The same may be said of the admission, made by Matthew, 'that Christ did not many works there, because of their unbelief';⁴ [as if the miracles were to be done only before persons ready to believe all they saw] and of the language put by the same writer⁵ into the mouth of Christ, touching the perpetuity of the Jewish law, 'till heaven and earth should pass away';⁶ an assertion so much at variance with the truth, that Marcion altered the words to invert the sense. In like manner, had St. Luke been disposed to magnify Christianity, he would not have represented a Roman governor as calling it 'a superstition of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive';⁷ nor, lastly, would he have confessed, that after Paul had preached, on his first arrival at Rome, to some Jews from morning to evening, 'that some believed, and some did not.'⁷

Next to the instances of candor may be stated the passages, which none could have been led to forge.

1. Matth. xxi. 21. 'If ye have faith and doubt not, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and cast into the sea, it shall be done.' Now had Christ not spoken these words, why should they have been put into his mouth? for, taken in their obvious sense, they carry with them a difficulty which no forger of a story would have thought of introducing.

2. Luke ix. 60. 'Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury the dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.' This apparently harsh expression would not

¹ Matth. xi. 2. Luke vii. 18.

² Matth. xxvi. 14.

³ John vi. 66.

⁴ xii. 58.

⁵ v. 18.

⁶ Acts xxv. 18.

⁷ Acts xxviii. 24.

have been surely assigned to Christ, had he not really used it.

3. Matth. v. 22. 'Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.' Here the language is cogent and well calculated for the purpose of impression; but inconsistent with the supposition of art on the part of the narrator.

4. John xx. 16. 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto my Father.' The very obscurity of the meaning of these words is a proof of their genuineness. A forger would have written more plainly.

5. John vi. 50. 'I am the living bread, which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread, which I will give him, is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' Here again the obscurity of the language proves its genuineness; an obscurity, felt by the disciples themselves, who, when they heard it, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can bear it?'

6. Matth. xviii. 2. In the account here given of Christ taking a child and placing it in the midst of his contentious disciples, we read of an act, which is well suited to the benignity of Christ's character, but by no means a thought so obvious as to present itself to the narrator of a forged story.

7. The account of the institution of the sacrament bears strong internal marks of genuineness. If it had been feigned, it would have been more full, and have come nearer to the actual mode of celebrating the rite, as practised early in the Christian churches. So in the forged piece, called the Apostolic Constitutions, the apostles enjoin many parts of the ritual in use during the second and third centuries, with as much particularity as a modern rubric could have done: whereas, in St. Matthew's history of the Lord's supper, there is not so much as the command to re-

peat it. Besides, the difficulty arising from the conciseness of Christ's expression, 'This is my body,' would have been avoided in a made-up story. I allow that the explication of these words, given by protestants, is satisfactory; but it is deduced from a diligent comparison of the words in question with forms of expression used by Christ elsewhere. No writer of a forged story would have thus cast in his reader's way a difficulty, which required research and erudition to clear up.

The argument which is built on these examples, extends both to the authenticity of the books and to the truth of the narrative: for it is improbable that the forger of a history in the name of another, should have inserted such passages into it; and it is improbable also, that the persons whose names the books bear should have fabricated such passages, if they had not believed them to express the truth.

The observation, therefore, of Lardner seems to be well-founded:—'Christians are induced to believe the writers of the Gospel, by observing the evidences of piety and probity that appear in their writings, in which there is no deceit, artifice, cunning, or design.' 'No remarks,' as Beattie has properly said, 'are thrown in, to anticipate objections; nothing of that caution, which never fails to distinguish the testimony of those who are conscious of imposture; no endeavor to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative.' 'It doth not appear,' says Duchal, 'that ever it came into the mind of these writers, to consider how this or the other action would appear to mankind, or what objections might be raised on them. But without at all attending to this, they lay the facts before you, at no pains to think whether they would appear credible or not. If the reader will not believe their testimony there is no help for it: they tell the truth, and attend to nothing else. Surely this looks like sincerity, and that they published no-

thing to the world, but what they believed themselves.'

As no improper supplement to this chapter, I crave a place here for observing the extreme 'naturalness' of some of the things related in the New Testament.

Mark ix. 23. 'Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' This struggle in the father's heart, between solicitude for the preservation of his child, and a kind of involuntary distrust of Christ's power to heal him, is here expressed with an air of reality, which could hardly be counterfeited.

Again, (Matt. xxi. 9.) the eagerness of the people to introduce Christ into Jerusalem, and their demand, a short time afterward, of his crucifixion, when he did not turn out what they expected him to be, so far from affording matter of objection, represents popular feelings in exact agreement with nature and with experience, as the flux and reflux of a wave. And the reason too, with which they who rejected Christ's mission kept themselves in countenance, is precisely the reason which such men usually give:—'Have any of the scribes or Pharisees believed on him?' (John vii. 8.)

John iv. 29. Christ having surprised the Samaritan woman with an allusion to a single particular in her domestic situation, 'she runs back to the city, and bids her neighbors to come, and see a man which told her all the things that ever she did.' This exaggeration appears to me very natural, in the hurried state of the woman's mind.

The Jewish lawyer's or divine's subtlety in running a distinction on the word 'neighbor,' in the precept, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' was no less natural than our Saviour's answer was decisive and satisfactory, Luke x. 29.

The consistency of St. Paul's character, in his zeal,

first against, and then for Christianity, carries with it very much the appearance of truth.

There are also some 'properties,' as they may be called, observable in the Gospel: that is, circumstances separately suiting with the situation, character, and intention of their respective authors.

St. Matthew, who was an inhabitant of Galilee, and did not join Christ's society until some time after Christ had come into Galilee to preach, has given us very little of his history prior to that period. St. John, who had been converted before, and who wrote to supply omissions in the other Gospels, relates some remarkable particulars, which had taken place before Christ left Judea, to go into Galilee.

St. Matthew (xv. 1.) has recorded the cavil of the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus, for eating 'with unclean hands.' St. Mark has also (vii. 1.) recorded the same transaction, taken probably from St. Matthew, but with this addition; 'For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders: and when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not: and many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables.' Now St. Matthew was not only a Jew himself, but, it is evident, wrote for Jewish readers. The above explanation, therefore, would in him have been unnatural, as not being wanted by the readers whom he addressed; but in St. Mark, who intended his own narrative for general circulation, and who travelled to distant countries in the service of the religion, it was properly added.

CHAPTER IV.

Identity of Christ's Character.

1. The argument expressed by this title, I apply principally to the comparison of the first three Gos-

pels with that of St. John. The passages of Christ's history, preserved by the latter, are, except his passion and resurrection, for the most part, different from those delivered by the other evangelists. And I think the ancient account of this difference to be the true one, viz. that St. John wrote after the rest, and to supply what he thought omissions in their narratives. But although actions and discourses are ascribed to Christ by St. John, in general different from what are given to him by the other evangelists, yet there is still a similitude of manner, which indicates that the actions and discourses proceeded from the same person. I do not deny, that a writer is able by study to sustain a distinction of character through a variety of incidents and situations; but the evangelists were not, I believe, ever suspected to have studied uniformity of character in the subjects of their histories. Such uniformity, if it exists, must on their part be casual; and any perceptible resemblance of manner, in discourses delivered by historians neither imitating nor referring to one another, affords a just presumption, that these are the discourses of the same real person.

This agreement is seen most strong in our Saviour's peculiar mode of teaching, which consists in the drawing his doctrine from the occasion, or turning a particular discourse then passing, into an opportunity of general instruction; for examples of which manner of teaching, compare Matt. xii. 47—50. xv. 1, 2, 10, 11. 15—20. xvi. 5. Mark i. 16, 17. x. 13, 14, 15. Luke xi. 27. xiii. 1—3. xiv. 15. with John iv. 12. 31. ix. 1—5. 35—40.

Now it is only necessary to compare the examples taken from St. John, with those from the other Gospels, to be satisfied of the identity of character in Christ's peculiar mode of teaching, in drawing reflections from accidental occurrences. But nothing is seen of this

manner in the discourses of other persons. Hence, it is fair to infer, that such a peculiarity would never have been attempted by the writer of a mere fiction, or if attempted, must have failed from the difficulty of supplying by imagination the incidents and the reflections together; nor could any but an historian of events that really happened, accumulate so many allusions to time and place, as appear, for instance, in the sermon on the mount.¹

II. There appears also to be an affinity between the history of Christ placing a little child in the midst of the disciples, as related by the first three evangelists,² and the history of Christ washing the feet of his disciples, as told by St. John.³ This affinity consists, 1. in the similarity of the moral of both stories, viz. touching the emulation of the disciples, and Christ's desire to check it; 2. in the similarity of the manner of teaching, which is the same in both stories, viz. by action.

III. Another proof of the identity of the character of Christ, is the appellation given him by all the evangelists, as 'the Son of Man;' by which Christ always designates himself alone; of which appellation there are seventeen instances in Matthew, twenty in Mark, twenty-one in Luke, and eleven in John.

IV. In like manner, the identity is preserved, when Christ is represented as withdrawing himself out of the way, whenever the behavior of the multitude indicated a disposition to tumult. Compare Matth. xiv. 22. and Luke v. 15. with John v. 13. and vi. 15. in which last instance, relative to the wish of the mob to make Jesus a king, the motive for Christ's conduct is given, while the conduct alone is mentioned by the other evangelists.

V. Another peculiarity in Christ's conduct was the reserve he used in declaring his own character. For

¹ See Bishop Law's Life of Christ.

² Matth. xviii. 1. Mark ix. 33. Luke ix. 46.

³ xiii. 3.

this reserve just reasons have been assigned by Locke ;¹ but it is not what one would have expected. Examples of this conduct are given in Matth. xvi. 20. Mark iii. 11. Luke iv. 41. And in John x. 24. 'Then came the Jews round about him, and said, How long dost thou make us doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.' But though the occasion was here different from the rest, and the information is only indirectly conveyed, still such coincidences, in a slight allusion, are in fact as strong, if not stronger, proofs of truth, than a similarity in assertions more direct.

VI. A further point of resemblance may be seen in the difficulty which the disciples found in understanding the language of their master, when he spoke of his future death and resurrection. The events connected with this announcement are distinctly noticed by Mark ix. 32. and Luke ix. 45. Now, though in John xvi. 16. the occasion is represented as different, the fact of the disciples' difficulty of apprehension on the same topic is the same.

VII. In like manner the meekness of Christ, during his last days, is recorded by all the evangelists, though on different occasions. Thus his answer to the high priest, as narrated by John xviii. 20. is of a piece with his reply to the armed party who seized him, as we read in Mark xiv. 48. and Luke xxii. 52. for in both we find the same mildness of manner, and the same reference to his public teaching. His mild expostulation with Pilate, as stated by St. John,² agrees with the account of his unruffled temper during his last scenes of life, as narrated by the other evangelists. In like manner, the sacred historians agree with each other in the urgent wish expressed by the judge and prosecutors to hear Christ's defence, and in his unwillingness to make any.

¹ See Reasonableness of Christianity.

² St. John, xviii. 34. xix. 11.

There are two other correspondences between the narratives of St. John and the other evangelists, which, as being different from the preceding, it is proper to notice more at length.

The first relates to our Saviour's agony, as it is called, in the garden, immediately previous to his apprehension. On that occasion the first three evangelists make him pray 'that the cup might pass from him.' Now, though St. John does not mention that scene, still he has the same allusion to a cup, in a scene immediately following, where Christ thus reproves Peter for his intemperate zeal: 'Put up thy sword into its sheath. The cup, which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' This is something more than consistency; it is a coincidence between writers, in whose narratives there is generally a great diversity of events; for if Jesus had, in the garden, used the expression, 'let this cup pass from me,' what so natural as that he should say subsequently, 'The cup, which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?'

The second instance of correspondence refers to the charge on which our Lord was condemned. Matthew and Mark¹ say, it was the threat of destroying the temple in three days, and of building up another without hands; but neither tell us on what circumstance the calumny was founded. This is supplied by St. John,² who relates, that when the Jews asked Christ for a sign, he answered, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Now, as this supplement could not have been inserted with the design to make one narrative tally with the other, (for no such design appears elsewhere in St. John,) it is plain that it owes its origin solely to the truth of the tradition.

Lastly, a strong instance of general agreement is

¹ Matth. xxvi. 61. Mark xiv. 58.

² ii. 19.

the following : The first three evangelists mention the appointment of the twelve apostles,¹ and give a catalogue of their names. John, without mentioning the appointment, or giving the catalogue, supposes, throughout his whole narrative, Christ to be accompanied by twelve disciples;² and whenever he notices any one,³ such one is included in the catalogue of the other evangelists : and the names principally occurring in the course of his history of Christ are the names extant in their list. This last agreement, which is of considerable moment, runs through every Gospel, and through every chapter of each.

All this bespeaks reality.

CHAPTER V.

Originality of our Saviour's Character.

The Jews, whether right or wrong, had understood their prophecies to foretell the advent of a person, who by supernatural assistance should advance their nation to independence.

Now, had Jesus been an enthusiast, it is probable he would have fallen in with the popular delusion ; and while he gave himself out to be the person intended by these predictions, he would have assumed the character to which they were universally supposed to relate.

But what is better than conjectures, is the fact, that all the pretended Messiahs actually did so ; of whom, as we learn from Josephus, there were many.

Why then, if Jesus were, like the rest, an enthusiast or impostor, did he pursue a different course ? Why assert his pretensions to a mission, whose benefit was to extend to a future state ; a thing unthought of, as the subject of the prophecies ? Does not the fact

¹ Matt. x. 1. Mark iii. 14. Luke vi. 12. ² vi. 70.

³ xx. 24. vi. 71.

that Jesus, coming as the Messiah, assumed a character totally different from the notion entertained of the Messiah, seem to be inconsistent with the supposition of his being an enthusiast or impostor? But if it be said that Jesus, having tried the most natural plan, turned at length to the other; I answer that the assertion is made not only without, but against, evidence; for that, though the rest might have done so, yet nothing of this sort was even thought of by them.

CHAPTER VI.

Conformity of the Facts occasionally mentioned or referred to in the New Testament with the State of Things in those Times, as represented by foreign and independent Accounts.

On this conformity much stress has been laid, and justly so; because it proves that the writers of the New Testament possessed a knowledge of places and things attainable only by a person living in the country and age, where and when the events are said to have happened. This argument, if proved satisfactorily, puts the genuineness of the writings beyond all dispute. It carries them up to the age of the reputed authors, when it must have been difficult to impose on the Christian public forgeries in the names of those authors, and when no forgeries were, it appears, attempted. It proves, at least, that the books were composed by persons living in the time and country in which these things were transacted; and, consequently, well informed of the facts which they relate. And this argument is stronger, when applied to the New Testament, than in the case of any other writings, from the mixed nature of the allusions which this book contains. The scene of action is not confined to a single country, but displayed in the greatest cities of the Roman empire. Allusions are made to the manners and principles of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews. This variety renders a forgery

proportionally more difficult, especially to writers of a posterior age. A Greek or Roman Christian, who lived in the second or third century, would have been wanting in Jewish literature; a Jewish convert in those ages would have been equally deficient in the knowledge of the language and history of Greece and Rome.¹

This, however, is an argument which depends so entirely on an induction of particulars, that it carries with it little force, without a view of the instances on which it is built. I have, therefore, to request the reader's attention to a detail of examples, collected from 'Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History;' which I have merely abridged, by omitting points in themselves not important or not sufficiently proved; and by contracting every section into the fewest words.

The writer principally made use of in the inquiry, is Josephus; who was born at Jerusalem four years after Christ's ascension, and wrote his history of the Jewish war some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in the year of our Lord 70. that is, thirty-seven years after the ascension; and finished his history of the Jews in the year 93. that is, sixty years after the ascension.

At the head of each article, I have referred, by figures included in brackets, to the page of Dr. Lardner's volume, where the section, from which the abridgment is made, begins. The edition used, is that of 1741.

I. [p. 14.] Matt. ii. 22. 'When he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.'

It is here asserted, that Archelaus succeeded Herod in Judea; and it is implied, that his power did not

¹ Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament (Mish's Translations), c. ii. sect. xi.

extend to Galilee. Now we learn from Josephus, that Herod the Great, whose dominion included all the land of Israel, appointed Archelaus his successor in Judea, and assigned the rest of his dominions to other sons.¹

St. Matthew says, that Archelaus reigned in Judea. So Josephus says, not only that Herod appointed Archelaus his successor in Judea, but that he also appointed him with the title of King, in Greek βασιλεύς.²

II. [p. 19.] Luke iii. 1. 'In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, the word of God came unto John.'

By the will of Herod the Great, his two sons were appointed, one (Herod Antipas) tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa, and the other (Philip) tetrarch of Trachonitis and the neighboring countries.³ We have therefore these two persons in the situations in which St. Luke places them; and that in the fifteenth year of Tiberius they continued in the possession of their territories and titles, appears from Josephus, who relates of Herod, 'that he was removed by Caligula, the successor of Tiberius;'⁴ and of Philip, 'that he died in the twentieth year of Tiberius, when he had governed Trachonitis and Batanea and Gaulanitis thirty-seven years.'⁵

III. [p. 20.] Mark vi. 17. 6 'Herod had sent forth, and laid hold on John, and bound him in prison, for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.'

With this compare Joseph. Antiq. xviii. 6. 1.—'He (Herod the tetrarch) made a visit to Herod his brother.—Here, falling in love with Herodias, the

¹ Antiq. xvii. 8. 1.

² De Bell. i. 33. 7.

³ Antiq. xvii. 8. 1.

⁴ Antiq. xviii. 8. 2.

⁵ Antiq. viii. 5. 6.

⁶ See also Matt. xiv. 1—13. Luke iii. 19.

wife of the said Herod, he ventured to make her proposals of marriage.' ¹

Again, Mark vi. 22. 'And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in and danced——.'

With this also compare Joseph. Antiq. xviii. 6. 4. 'Herodias was married to Herod, son of Herod the Great. They had a daughter, whose name was Salome; after whose birth Herodias, in utter violation of the laws of her country, left her husband, then living, and married Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, her husband's brother by the father's side.'

IV. [p. 29.] Acts xii. 1. 'Now, about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands, to vex certain of the church.' In the conclusion of the same chapter, Herod's death is represented to have taken place soon after this persecution. Now there was no portion of time for thirty years before, nor ever afterward, in which there was a king at Jerusalem, except in the last three years of this Herod's life, within which period the transaction recorded in the Acts is stated to have taken place. This prince was the grandson of Herod the Great. In the Acts, he appears under his family name of Herod; by Josephus he was called Agrippa. For proof that he was a king, properly so called, we have the testimony of Josephus, in direct terms:—'sending for him to his palace, Caligula put a crown on his head, and ap-

¹ The affinity of the two accounts is unquestionable; but there is a difference in the name of Herodias's first husband, which in the evangelist, is Philip; in Josephus, Herod. The difficulty, however, will not appear considerable, when we recollect how common it was in those times for the same person to bear two names. Simon, which is called Peter; Lebbeus, whose surname is Thaddeus; Thomas, which is called Didymus; Simeon, who is called Niger; Saul, who was also called Paul. The solution is rendered likewise easier in the present case, by the consideration, that Herod the Great had children by seven or eight wives; that Josephus mentions three of his sons under the name of Herod; that it is, nevertheless, highly probable, that the brothers bore some additional name, by which they were distinguished from one another. Lardner, vol. ii, p. 897.

pointed him king of the tetrarchy of Philip, intending also to give him the tetrarchy of Lysanias.'¹ And that Judea was at last included in his dominions, appears by a subsequent passage of the same writer, where he tells us, that Claudius, by a decree, confirmed to Agrippa the dominion which Caligula had given him; adding also Judea and Samaria, in the utmost extent, as possessed by his grandfather Herod.²

v. [p. 32.] Acts xii. 19—23. 'And he (Herod) went down from Judea to Cesarea, and there abode.—And on a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne, and made an oration unto them; and the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man: and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.'

Joseph. Antiq. xix. 8. 2. 'He went to the city of Cesarea. Here he celebrated shows in honor of Cæsar. On the second day of the shows, early in the morning, he came into the theatre, dressed in a robe of silver, of most curious workmanship. The rays of the rising sun, reflected from such a splendid garb, gave him a majestic and awful appearance. They called him a god; and entreated him to be propitious to them, saying, Hitherto we have respected you as a man; but now we acknowledge you to be more than mortal. Immediately after this, he was seized with pains in his bowels; and being carried with all haste to his palace, he expired in five days' time.'

The reader will perceive the accordancy of these accounts in various particulars. The place (Cesarea), the set day, the gorgeous dress, the acclamations of the assembly, the peculiar turn of the flattery, the sudden and critical incursion of the disease, are circumstances noticed in both narratives. The worms,

¹ Antiq. xviii. 7. 10.

² Ib. xix. 5. 1.

mentioned by St. Luke, are not remarked by Josephus; but the appearance of these is a symptom, not unusually attending the disease which Josephus describes, viz. a violent affection of the bowels.

VI. [p. 41.] Acts xxiv. 24. 'And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul.'

Joseph. Antiq. xx. 6. 1, 2. 'Agrippa gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus, king of the Emesenes, when he had consented to be circumcised.—But this marriage of Drusilla with Azizus was dissolved in a short time after, in this manner:—When Felix was procurator of Judea, having had a sight of her, he was mightily taken with her.—She was induced to transgress the laws of her country, and marry Felix.'

Here the public station of Felix, the name of his wife, and the singular circumstance of her religion, all appear in perfect conformity with the evangelist.

VII. [p. 46.] Acts xxv. 13. 'And after certain days, king Agrippa and Bernice came to Cesarea to salute Festus.' We are here told, that Agrippa was a king, but not of Judea; for he came to salute Festus, who at this time administered the government of that country at Cesarea.

Now the Agrippa here spoken of, was the son of Herod Agrippa, mentioned in the last article; but that he did not succeed to his father's kingdom, nor ever recovered Judea, which had been a part of it, we learn from Josephus.¹ But though disappointed of his father's kingdom, in which was included Judea, that he was nevertheless rightly styled King Agrippa, being in possession of considerable territories bordering on Judea, we gather from the same authority; for, after several successive donations of country, 'Claudius, at the same time that he sent Felix to be

¹ Antiq. xix. ad fin.

procurator of Judea, promoted Agrippa from Chalcis to a greater kingdom, giving to him the tetrarchy which had been Philip's ; and he added moreover the kingdom of Lysanias, and the province that had belonged to Varus.'¹

St. Paul addresses this person as a Jew : ' King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest.' As the son of Herod Agrippa, who is described by Josephus to have been a zealous Jew, it is reasonable to suppose that he maintained the same profession. But what is more material to remark, because it is more close and circumstantial, is, that St. Luke, speaking of the father, (Acts xii. 1—3.) calls him Herod the king, and gives an example of the exercise of his authority at Jerusalem : speaking of the son, (xxv. 13.) he calls him king, but not of Judea ; which distinction agrees correctly with the history.

VIII. [p. 51.] Acts xiii. 6. ' And when they had gone through the isle (Cyprus) to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus, which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man.'

The word which is here translated ' deputy,' signifies ' proconsul,' and on this word our observation is founded. The provinces of the Roman empire were of two kinds : those belonging to the emperor, in which the governor was called *proprætor* ; and those belonging to the senate, in which the governor was called *proconsul*. Now it appears from Dio Cassius, (liv.) that the province of Cyprus, which in the original distribution was assigned to the emperor, had been transferred to the senate, in exchange for some others ; and that, after this exchange, the appropriate title of the Roman governor was *proconsul*.

[p. 55.] Acts xviii. 12. ' And when Gallio was deputy (*proconsul*) of Achaia.'

¹ De Bell. ii. 12.

The propriety of the title 'proconsul' is in this passage still more critical; for the province of Achaia, after passing from the senate to the emperor, had been restored again by the emperor Claudius to the senate (and consequently its government had become proconsular) only six or seven years before the time in which this transaction is said to have taken place.¹ And what confines with strictness the appellation to the time is, that Achaia under the following reign ceased to be a Roman province at all.

ix. [p. 152.] It appears, as well from the general constitution of a Roman province, as from what Josephus delivers concerning the state of Judea in particular,² that the power of life and death resided exclusively in the Roman governor; but that the Jews, nevertheless, had magistrates and a council, invested with a subordinate and municipal authority. This economy is discerned in every part of the Gospel narrative of our Saviour's crucifixion.

x. [p. 203.] Acts ix. 31. 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria.'

This rest synchronises with the attempt of Caligula to place his statue in the temple of Jerusalem; the threat of which outrage produced amongst the Jews a consternation that, for a season, diverted their attention from every other object.³

xi. [p. 218.] Acts xxi. 30. 'And they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound and to be carried into the castle. And when he came on the stairs,' &c.

We have here the band of Roman soldiers at Jerusalem, their office (to suppress tumults), the castle, the

¹ Suet. in Claud. c. 25. Dio, lib. lxi.

² Antiq. xx. c. 8. sect. 5. c. 1. sect. 2.

³ Joseph de Bell. xi. 13. 1.

stairs, both, as it should seem, adjoining to the temple. These particulars are recorded by Joseph. de Bell. v. 5. 8. 'Antonia was situated at the angle of the western and northern porticoes of the outer temple. It was built on a rock fifty cubits high, steep on all sides.—On that side where it joined to the porticoes of the temple, there were stairs reaching to each portico, by which the guard descended; who kept a watch on the people on the feast-days to prevent all disorders.'

XII. [p. 224.] Acts iv. 1. 'And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came on them.' Here we have a public officer, under the title of captain of the temple, and he probably a Jew, as he accompanied the priests and Sadducees in apprehending the apostles.

Joseph. de Bell. ii. 17. 2. 'And at the temple, Eleazar, the son of Ananias, the high priest, a young man of a bold and resolute disposition, then captain, persuaded those who performed the sacred ministrations not to receive the gift or sacrifice of any stranger.'

XIII. [p. 225.] Acts xxv. 12. 'Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.' That it was usual for the Roman presidents to have a council, consisting of their friends, and other chief Romans in the province, appears expressly in the following passage of Cicero's oration against Verres: 'Illud negare posses, aut nunc negabis, te, concilio tuo dimisso, viris primariis, qui in concilio C. Sacerdotis fuerant, tibi que esse volebant, remotis, de re judicata judicasse?'

XIV. [p. 235.] Acts xvi. 13. 'And (at Philippi) on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made,' or where a *προσεύχη*, oratory, or place of prayer, was allowed. The particularity to be remarked, is the situation of the

place where prayer was wont to be made, viz. by a river side.

Philo, describing the conduct of the Jews of Alexandria, relates of them, that 'early in the morning, flocking out of the gates of the city, they go to the neighboring shores (for the *πρόσενχαι* were destroyed), and, standing in a most pure place, they lift up their voices with one accord.'¹

Josephus gives us a decree of the city of Halicarnassus, permitting the Jews to build oratories.—'We ordain that the Jews who are willing, men and women, do observe the sabbaths, and perform sacred rites according to the Jewish laws, and build oratories by the sea side.'²

Tertullian, among other Jewish rites and customs, such as feasts, sabbaths, fasts, and unleavened bread, mentions 'orationes litorales;' that is, prayers by the river side.³

xv. [p. 255.] Acts xxvi. 5. 'After the most 'straitest' sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.'

Joseph. de Bell. i. 5. 2. 'The Pharisees were reckoned the most religious of any of the Jews, and to be the most 'exact' and skilful in explaining the laws.'

In the original, the same Greek adjective is rendered 'strait' in the Acts, and 'exact' in Josephus:

xvi. [p. 255.] Mark vii. 3, 4. 'The Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders; and many other things there be which they have received to hold.'

Joseph. Antiq. xiii. 10. 6. 'The Pharisees have delivered to the people many institutions, as received from the fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses.'

xvii. [p. 259.] Acts xiii. 8. 'For the Sadducees

¹ Philo in Flacc. p. 382.

² Joseph. Antiq. xiv. 10. 24.

³ Tertull. ad Nat. i. 13.

say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.'

Joseph. de Bell. ii. 8. 14. 'They (the Pharisees) believe every soul to be immortal, but that the soul of the good only passes into another body, and that the soul of the wicked is punished with eternal punishment.' On the other hand, (Antiq. xviii. 1. 4.) 'It is the opinion of the Sadducees, that souls perish with the bodies.'

XVIII. [p. 268.] Acts v. 17. 'Then the high-priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation.' St. Luke here intimates, that the high-priest was a Sadducee; which is a character one would not have expected to meet with in that station. The circumstance, remarkable as it is, was not however without examples.

Joseph. Antiq. xiii. 10. 6. 7. 'John Hyrcanus, high-priest of the Jews, forsook the Pharisees on a disgust, and joined himself to the party of the Sadducees.' This high-priest died 107 years before the Christian era.

Again, (Antiq. xx. 8. 1.) 'This Ananus the younger, who received the high-priesthood, was of the sect of the Sadducees.' This high-priest lived little more than twenty years after the transaction in the Acts.

XIX. [p. 282.] Luke ix. 51. 'And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.'

Joseph. Antiq. xx. 5. 1. 'It was the custom of the Galileans, who went up to the holy city at the feasts, to travel through the country of Samaria. As they were in their journey, some inhabitants of the village

called *Ginæa*, which lies on the borders of Samaria and the great plain, falling on them, killed a great many of them.'

xx. [p. 278.] John iv. 20. 'Our fathers,' said the Samaritan woman, 'worshipped in this mountain.'

Joseph. Antiq. xviii. 5. 1. 'Commanding them to meet him at Mount Gerizim, which is by them (the Samaritans) esteemed the most sacred of all mountains.'

xxi. [p. 312.] Matt. xxvi. 3. 'Then assembled together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high-priest, who was called Caiaphas.' That Caiaphas was high-priest throughout the presidentship of Pontius Pilate, appears from the following account:—He was made high-priest by Valerius Gratus, predecessor of Pontius Pilate, and was removed from his office by Vitellius, president of Syria, after Pilate was sent out of the province of Judea. Josephus relates the advancement of Caiaphas to the high-priesthood in this manner: 'Gratus gave the high-priesthood to Simon, the son of Camithus. He, having enjoyed this honor not above a year, was succeeded by Joseph, who is also called Caiaphas.¹ After this, Gratus went away for Rome, having been eleven years in Judea; and Pontius Pilate came thither as his successor.' Of the removal of Caiaphas from his office, Josephus, likewise, afterward informs us;—'Vitellius ordered Pilate to repair to Rome; and after that, went up himself to Jerusalem, when he took away the priesthood from the high-priest, Joseph, who is called Caiaphas.'²

xxii. (Michaelis xi. 11.) Acts xxiii. 4. 'And they that stood by, said, Revilest thou God's high-priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high-priest.' Now, on inquiry into the history of the age, it turns out that Ananias, of whom this is spoken,

¹ Antiq. xviii. 2. 2.

² Ibid. xvii. 5. 3.

was, in truth, not the high-priest, though he was sitting in judgment in that capacity. The fact is, that he formerly held the office, and had been deposed; that the person who succeeded him had been murdered; that another had not been appointed to the station; and that, during the vacancy, he had taken on himself the discharge of the office.¹ This singular situation of the high-priesthood took place between the death of Jonathan, who was murdered by order of Felix, and the accession of Ismael, who was invested with the high-priesthood by Agrippa; and precisely in this interval it happened that St. Paul was apprehended, and brought before the Jewish council.

XXIII. [p. 323.] Matt. xxvi. 59. 'Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against him.'

Joseph. Antiq. xviii. 15. 3. 'Then might be seen the high-priests themselves with ashes on their heads, and their breasts naked.'

The agreement here consists in speaking of the high-priests or chief priests (for the name in the original is the same in the plural number) when, in strictness, there was only one high-priest: which may be considered as a proof, that the evangelists were habituated to the manner of speaking then in use, because they retain it when it is neither accurate nor just. For the sake of brevity, I have put down, from Josephus, only a single example of the application of this title in the plural number; but it is his usual style.

Ib. [p. 871.] Luke iii. 1. 'Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, Annas and Caiaphas being the high-priests, the word of God came unto John.' There is a passage in Josephus, which will vindicate the evangelist from the objection of his giving the title of high-priest to two

¹ Antiq. xx. c. 5. sect. 2; c. 9. sect. 2.

persons at the same time: 'Quadratus sent two others of the most powerful men of the Jews, as also the high priests Jonathan and Ananias.'¹ That Annas possessed an authority coordinate with the high priest, properly so called, may be inferred from St. John's Gospel, which relates that 'the soldiers led him away to Annas first.'² And this might be noticed as an example of undesigned coincidence in the two evangelists.

Again, [p. 870.] Acts iv. 6. Annas is called the high priest, though Caiaphas was in the office of the high-priesthood. In like manner, in Josephus,³ 'Joseph, the son of Gorion, and the high priest Ananus, were chosen to be supreme governors of all things in the city.' Yet Ananus, though here called the high priest, was not then in the office of the high-priesthood. The truth is, there is an indeterminateness in the use of this title in the Gospel: sometimes it is applied exclusively to the person who held the office at the time; sometimes to one or two more, who probably shared with him some of the functions of the office; and sometimes to such of the priests as were eminent by their station or character;⁴ and there is the very same indeterminateness in Josephus.

XXIV. [p. 347.] John xix. 19, 20. 'And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross.' That such was the custom of the Romans on these occasions, appears from passages of Suetonius and Dio Cassius: 'Patremfamilias—canibus objecit, cum hoc titulo, Impie locutus parmularius.' Suet. Domit. cap. x. And in Dio Cassius, liv. we have the following: 'Having led him through the midst of the court or assembly, with a writing signifying the cause of his death, and afterward crucifying him.'

Ib. 'And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.' That it was also usual about this time, in Je-

¹ De Bell. ix. 12. 6.

² xviii. 13.

³ De Bell. ii. 20. 3.

⁴ Mark xiv. 53.

rusalem, to set up advertisements in different languages, is gathered from Josephus; 'Did ye not erect,' says Titus, 'pillars with inscriptions on them, in the Greek and in our language, Let no one pass beyond these bounds?'

xxv. [p. 352.] Matt. xxvii. 26. 'When he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.'

The following passages occur in Josephus:

'Being beaten, they were crucified opposite to the citadel.'¹

'Whom, having first scourged with whips, he crucified.'²

'He was burnt alive, having been first beaten.'³

To which may be added one from Livy, xi. 5. 'Productique omnes, virgisque cæsi, ac securi percussi.'

A modern example may illustrate the use we make of this instance. The preceding a capital execution by the corporal punishment of the sufferer is a practice unknown in England, but retained in Sweden. This circumstance, therefore, in the account of an English execution, by an English writer, would not only bring a suspicion on the truth of the account, but would considerably impeach its pretensions to having been written by the author whose name it bore: whereas the same circumstance, in the account of a Swedish execution, would support the authenticity of the book in which it was found; or, at least, would prove that the author, whoever he was, possessed the knowledge which he ought to possess.

xxvi. [p. 353.] John xix. 16. 'And they took Jesus, and led him away; and he, bearing his cross, went forth.'

Plutarch, 'De iis qui sero puniuntur,' p. 554. ed. 1624. 'Every kind of wickedness produces its own particular torment, just as every malefactor, when he is brought forth to execution, carries his own cross.'

¹ p. 1247, ed. Huds.

² p. 1030.

³ p. 1327.

XXVII. John xix. 32. 'Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.'

Constantine abolished the punishment of the cross : in commending which edict, a heathen writer notices this very circumstance of breaking the legs : 'Eo pius, ut etiam vetus teterrimumque supplicium patibulorum, et cruribus suffringendis, primus removerit.' Aur. Vict. Cæs. c. xli.

XXVIII. [p. 457.] Acts iii. 1. 'Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.'

Joseph Antiq. xv. 7, 8. 'Twice every day, in the morning and at the ninth hour, the priests perform their duty at the altar.'

XXIX. [p. 462.] Acts xv. 21. 'For Moses, of old time, hath, in every city, them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.'

Joseph. contra Ap. l. ii. 'He (Moses) gave us the law, and appointed that we should meet together every week to hear it read.'

XXX. [p. 465.] Acts xxi. 23. 'We have four men, which have a vow on them ; take them and purify thyself with them, that they may shave their heads.'

Joseph. de Bell. xi. 15. 'It is customary for those who have been afflicted with some distemper, or have labored under other difficulties, to make a vow thirty days before they offer sacrifices, to abstain from wine, and shave their heads.'

Ib. v. 24. 'Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads.'

Joseph. Antiq. xix. 6. 'He (Herod Agrippa) coming to Jerusalem, offered up sacrifices of thanksgiving, and omitted nothing prescribed by the law. For which reason he also ordered a good number of Nazarites to be shaved.' We here find that it was an act of piety amongst the Jews, to defray for those

who were under the Nazaritic vow, the expenses which attended its completion ; and that the phrase was, ‘ that they might be shaved.’ The custom and the expression are remarkable, and in close conformity with the Scripture account.

xxxI. [p. 474.] 2 Cor. xi. 24. ‘ Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, save one.’

Joseph. Antiq. iv. 8. 21. ‘ He that acts contrary hereto, let him receive forty stripes, wanting one, from the public officer.’

The coincidence here is singular, because the law allowed forty stripes. See Deut. xxv. 3. It proves that the author of the Epistle to the Corinthians was guided, not by books, but facts ; because his statement agrees with the actual custom, even when that custom deviated from the written law, and from what he must have learnt by consulting the Jewish code, as set forth in the Old Testament.

xxxII. [p. 490.] Luke iii. 12. ‘ Then came also publicans to be baptised.’ From this quotation, as well as from the history of Matthew (Luke v. 29.) and of Zaccheus, (Luke xix. 2.) it appears, that the publicans or tax-gatherers were generally Jews ; which, as the country was then under a Roman government, and the taxes were paid to the Romans, was a circumstance not to be expected. That it was the truth, however, appears from a short passage of Josephus.

De Bell. ii. 14. 45. ‘ But Florus not restraining these practices by his authority, the chief men of the Jews, among whom was John the publican, not knowing well what course to take, wait on Florus, and give him eight talents of silver to stop the building.’

xxxIII. [p. 496.] Acts xxii. 25. ‘ And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned ?’

‘ Facinus est vinciri civem Romanum ; scelus verberari.’ Cicer. in Verr.

‘Cædebatur virgis, in medio foro Messanæ, civis Romanus, judices; cum interea nullus gemitus, nulla vox alia istius miseri inter dolorem crepitumque plagarum audiebatur, nisi hæc, Civis Romanus sum.’ Ib.

xxxiv. [p. 513.] Acts xxii. 27. ‘Then the chief captain came, and said unto him (Paul), Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.’ The circumstance here to be noticed is, that a Jew was a Roman citizen.

Joseph Antiq. xiv. 10. 13. ‘Lucius Lentulus, the consul, declared, I have dismissed from the service the Jewish Roman citizens, who observe the rites of the Jewish religion at Ephesus.’

Acts xxii. 28. ‘And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom.’

Dio Cassius; lx. ‘This privilege, which had been bought formerly at a great price, became so cheap, that it was commonly said, a man might be made a Roman citizen for a few pieces of broken glass.’

xxxv. [p. 521.] Acts xxviii. 16. ‘And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him;’ and in ver. 20. ‘I am bound with this chain.’

‘Quemadmodum eadem catena et custodiam et militem copulat; sic ista, quæ tam dissimilia sunt, pariter incedunt.’ Seneca, Ep. v.

‘Proconsul æstimare solet, utrum in carcerem recipienda sit persona, an militi tradenda.’ Ulpian. l. i. sect. De Custod. et Exhib. Reor.

In the confinement of Agrippa by the order of Tiberius, Antonia managed, that the centurion who presided over the guards, and the soldier to whom Agrippa was to be bound, might be men of mild character. (Joseph. Antiq. xviii. 7. 5.) After the accession of Caligula, Agrippa also, like Paul, was suffered to dwell, as a prisoner, in his own house.

xxxvi. [p. 531.] Acts xxvii. 1. 'And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul, and certain other prisoners, unto one named Julius.' Since not only Paul, but certain other prisoners, were sent by the same ship into Italy, the text must be considered as carrying an intimation; that the sending of persons from Judea to be tried at Rome, was an ordinary practice. That it was so, is made out by a variety of examples from the writings of Josephus; and, amongst others, by the following, which comes near to the time and subject of the instance in the Acts: 'Felix, for some slight offence, bound and sent to Rome several priests of his acquaintance, and very good men, to answer for themselves to Cæsar.' Joseph. in Vit. sect. 3.

xxxvii. [p. 539.] Acts xi. 27. 'And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one of them, named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world (or all the country); which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.'

Joseph. Antiq. xx. 4. 2. 'In their time (i. e. about the fifth or sixth year of Claudius) a great dearth happened in Judea.'

xxxviii. [p. 555.] Acts xviii. 1, 2. 'Because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome.'

Suet. Claud. c. xxv. 'Judæos, impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes, Roma expulit.'

xxxix. [p. 664.] Acts v. 37. 'After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him.'

Joseph. de Bell. l. vii. 'He (who in another place is called by Josephus Judas the Galilean) persuaded not a few not to enrol themselves, when Cyrenius the censor was sent into Judea.'

xl. [p. 942.] Acts xxi. 38. 'Art not thou that

Egyptian, which, before these days, madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers ?

Joseph. de Bell. ii. 13. 5. ' But the Egyptian false prophet brought a yet heavier disaster on the Jews ; for this impostor, coming into the country, and gaining the reputation of a prophet, gathered together thirty thousand men, who were deceived by him. Having brought them out of the wilderness to the mount of Olives, he intended thence to make his attack on Jerusalem ; but Felix, coming suddenly on him with the Roman soldiers, prevented the attack. A great number of those that were with him were either slain or taken prisoners.'

In these two passages, the designation of this impostor, an ' Egyptian,' without the proper name ; ' the wilderness ;' his escape, though his followers were destroyed ; the time of the transaction, which could not be a long time before the words in Luke are supposed to have been spoken ; are circumstances of close correspondence. There is only one point of disagreement, in the number of his followers, which in the Acts are called four thousand, and by Josephus thirty thousand : but, 1. numbers are very liable to the errors of transcribers ; 2. Josephus is not, in this point, consistent with himself ; for, in his Antiquities, he says four hundred were killed on this occasion, and two hundred taken prisoners ;¹ and, 3. it is probable that Lysias and Josephus spoke of the expedition in its different stages : Lysias, of those who followed the Egyptian out of Jerusalem ; Josephus, of all who were collected about him afterward from different quarters.

XLI. (Lardner's Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, vol. iii. p. 21.) Acts xvii. 22. ' Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens,

¹ xx. 7. sect. 6.

I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious; for, as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.'

Diogenes Laërtius, in the life of Epimenides, relates of him, that, being invited to Athens for that purpose, he delivered the city from a pestilence in this manner;—' Taking several sheep, some black, others white, he led them up to the Areopagus, and then let them go where they would, and gave orders to those who followed them, wherever any of them should lie down, to sacrifice it to the god to whom it belonged; and so the plague ceased. Hence it has come to pass, that to this present time, may be found in the boroughs of the Athenians anonymous altars, a memorial of the expiation then made.'¹ These altars, it may be presumed, were called 'anonymous,' because there was not the name of any particular deity inscribed on them.

Pausanias, in his description of Athens, having mentioned an altar of Jupiter Olympius, adds, ' And nigh to it is an altar of unknown gods.'² And in another place, he speaks ' of altars of gods called unknown.'³

Philostratus records it as an observation of Apollonius Tyanæus, ' That it was wise to speak well of all the gods, especially at Athens, where altars of unknown demons were erected.'⁴

The author of the dialogue ' Philopatris,' by many supposed to be Lucian, makes Critias swear by the unknown god of Athens; and, near the end of the dialogue, has these words, ' But let us find out the unknown god at Athens; and, stretching our hands to heaven, offer to him our praises and thanksgivings.'⁵

¹ In Epimenide, i. 110.

² Paus. v. p. 412.

³ Paus. i. p. 4.

⁴ Philostr. Apoll. Tyan. l. vi. c. 3.

⁵ Lucian. in Philop. t. ii. Græv. p. 767. 780.

Thus it appears beyond controversy, that altars with this inscription were existing at Athens, at the time when St. Paul is alleged to have been there; and that this inscription was peculiar to the Athenians: at least, there is no evidence that altars were inscribed to the unknown god in any other country. Supposing the history of St. Paul to be a fable, the author of the Acts of the Apostles would scarcely have hit on a circumstance so extraordinary, and introduce it by an allusion so suitable to St. Paul's character.

The examples here collected will be sufficient to satisfy us, that the writers of the Christian history knew something of what they were writing about. The argument is also strengthened by considering,—

I. That these agreements appear, not only in articles of public history, but even in minute and peculiar circumstances, in which a forger is most likely to be found tripping.

II. That the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place A. D. 70. produced such a change in the state of the country, and the condition of the Jews, that a writer, unacquainted with the circumstances of the nation before that event, would find it difficult to avoid mistakes, in endeavoring to give detailed accounts of transactions connected with those circumstances.

III. That there appears, in the writers of the New Testament, a knowledge of the affairs of those times, which we do not find in later authors. Therefore they could not have composed our histories.

Amidst so many conformities, we are not to wonder that we meet with some difficulties. The principal of these I will briefly put down, together with the solutions which they have received; referring the reader for the historical proofs of my assertions, and for the Greek criticisms on which some are founded, to vol. ii. of the first part of Lardner's larger work.

1. The taxing, during which Jesus was born, was 'first made,' as we read in St. Luke, 'whilst Cyrenius was governor of Syria.'¹ Now Cyrenius was not governor of Syria until ten years at least after the birth of Christ; and a taxing, or census, was made in Judea in the beginning of his government. The evangelist has therefore misplaced the date of it by an error of ten years, at least.

The answer to the accusation is found in his using the word 'first;' which, if taken strictly, would prove that the writer had more than one of those taxings in contemplation; and if so, then it is too much, for the sake of convicting him of a mistake, to lay it down as certain, that he intended to refer to the one that others refer to.

The sentence in St. Luke may be construed thus: 'This was the first assessment of Cyrenius, governor of Syria;'² the words 'governor of Syria' being used after the name of Cyrenius as his title, belonging to him at the time of writing the account, though acquired after the transaction which the account describes. A modern writer, not very exact in the choice of his expressions, in relating the affairs of the East Indies, might easily say, that such a thing was done by Governor Hastings; though, in truth, the thing had been done by him before his advancement to the governorship. And this, we contend, is precisely the inaccuracy which has produced the difficulty in St. Luke.

At any rate, it appears, from the form of the ex-

¹ chap. ii. verse 2.

² If the word, which we render 'first,' be rendered 'before,' which it has been strongly contended that the Greek idiom allows of, the whole difficulty vanishes: for then the passage would be, 'Now this taxing was made before Cyrenius was governor of Syria;' which corresponds with the chronology. But I rather choose to argue, that however the word 'first' be rendered, to give it a meaning at all, it militates with the objection. In this I think there can be no mistake.

pression, that he had two taxings or enrolments in contemplation. And if Cyrenius had been sent on this business into Judea, before he became governor of Syria, (for which there is external evidence of an enrolment going on about this time, under some person or other,)¹ then the census, made by him in the beginning of his government, would form a 'second,' so as to occasion the other to be called the 'first.'

II. Another chronological objection is brought against St. Luke, who says that, 'in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar,—Jesus began to be about thirty years of age.' Now, supposing Jesus to have been born, as Luke relates, in the time of Herod, he must, according to the dates given in Josephus and the Roman historians, have been at least thirty-one years of age in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. If he was born, as St. Matthew intimates, one or two years before Herod's death, he would have been thirty-two or thirty-three years old at that time.

The solution turns on an alteration in the construction of the Greek. St. Luke's words are allowed by learned men to signify, not 'that Jesus began to be about thirty years of age,' but 'that he was about thirty years of age when he began his ministry.' This construction being admitted, the adverb 'about' gives us all the latitude we want.

III. Acts v. 36. 'For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody,' &c.

Josephus has preserved the account of an impostor of the name of Theudas, who created disturbances, and was slain; but according to the date assigned to this man's appearance, (in which, however, it is pos-

¹ Josephus (Antiq. xvii. 2. 6.) has this remarkable passage: 'When therefore the whole Jewish nation took an oath to be faithful to Cæsar, and the interests of the king.' This transaction corresponds with the time of Christ's birth. What is called a 'census,' and which we render 'taxing,' was delivering on oath an account of their property. This might be accompanied with an oath of fidelity, or might be mistaken by Josephus for it.

sible that Josephus may have been mistaken,)¹ it must have been, at least, seven years after Gamaliel's speech was delivered. It has been replied to the objection,² that there might be two impostors of this name. In like manner, Josephus mentions four persons of the name of Simon within forty years, and three of the name of Judas within ten years, who were all leaders of insurrections: and it is likewise recorded by this historian, that on the death of Herod the Great, there were innumerable disturbances in Judea.³ Usher was of opinion, that one of the three Judases above mentioned was Gamaliel's Theudas;⁴ and that with a less variation of the name than we actually find in the Gospels, where one of the twelve apostles is called, by Luke, Judas, and by Mark, Thaddeus.⁵ Origen appears to have believed that there was an impostor of the name of Theudas before the nativity of Christ.⁶

iv. Matt. xxiii. 35. 'From the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.'

There is a Zacharias, whose death is related in 2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21, in a manner which perfectly supports our Saviour's allusion. But this Zacharias was the son of Jehoiada. There is also Zacharias the prophet, who was the son of Barachiah, and is so described in the superscription of his prophecy, but of whose death we have no account. The first Zacharias was, probably, the person spoken of by our Saviour; and the name of the father has been since added by some one, who took it from the title of the prophecy, which happened to be better known to him than the history in the Chronicles.

¹ Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament (Marsh's Translation), vol. i. p. 61.

² Lardner, part i. vol. ii. p. 922.

³ Antiq. l. xvii. c. 12, sect. 4.

⁴ Annals, p. 797.

⁵ Luke vi. 16. Mark iii. 18.

⁶ Orig. cont. Cels. p. 44.

There is likewise a Zacharias, the son of Baruch, related by Josephus to have been slain in the temple a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

It has been insinuated, that the words put into our Saviour's mouth contain a reference to this transaction, and were composed by some writer, who either confounded the time of the transaction with our Saviour's age, or inadvertently overlooked the anachronism.

Now, suppose these words to have been suggested by the transaction related in Josephus, and to have been falsely ascribed to Christ, observe what extraordinary accidental coincidences attend the forger's mistake.

1. We have a Zacharias in the book of Chronicles, whose death, and the manner of it, corresponds with the allusion ; 2. though the name of this person's father be erroneously put down in the Gospel, yet we can account for the error, by showing another Zacharias in the Jewish Scriptures, better known than the former, whose patronymic was actually that which appears in the text.

Now, such circumstances could not have met together in a mistake, did they not proceed from the circumstances themselves.

I have noticed, I think, all the difficulties of this kind. They are few : some of them admit of a clear, others of a probable solution. The reader will compare them with the number, the variety, the closeness, and the satisfactoriness, of the instances which are to be set against them ; and he will remember the scantiness, in many cases, of our intelligence, and the difficulties, which always attend imperfect information.

CHAPTER VII.

Undesigned Coincidences.

Between the letters of St. Paul, and his history in the Acts, there exist many marks of coincidence.

Now, that the history was not taken from the letters, nor the letters from the history, a mere perusal is sufficient to prove. Hence, the coincidence must be the effect of accident or design. It cannot, however, be designed; for it is found in so many and minute circumstances, as to do away the possibility of contrivance. It must, therefore, be accidental; but of such a kind, as can arise only from the genuineness of the writings, and the truth of the narrative; since, by no other means could such an accident possibly occur.

But as this question is fully discussed in my '*Horæ Paulinæ*,' it is unnecessary to enter on it here in detail, especially as any thing short of such detail would, if practicable, be useless: it is more pertinent to point out how the argument, drawn from this coincidence, bears on the general question of the Christian history.

1. St. Paul, in his letters, affirms distinctly his own performance of miracles, and that 'miracles were the signs of an apostle.'¹ Now, if this testimony really comes from St. Paul himself, it is invaluable; and that it does so, the argument, arising from the coincidence above mentioned, gives us a firm assurance.

2. It shows that the events narrated in St. Paul's Epistles are real; and thus supports our assertion, that the original witnesses of the Christian story voluntarily underwent dangers and difficulties in consequence of their belief in the story, and for the sake of imparting the knowledge of it to others.

3. It shows that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles was well acquainted with St. Paul's history, and probably a companion of his travels; and that, consequently, the Gospel, written by the same person, was written by one, who, from his connexion with the primitive Christians, had an opportunity of knowing correctly the transactions he relates. Nor is this inference in favor of the truth of the Gospel with-

¹ Rom. xv. 18. 2 Cor. xii. 12.

out a fair warrant, when the two are considered as parts of the same history; for though there are instances of second parts being forgeries, I know of no first part being so, where the second alone is held to be genuine.

As a sequel to this argument, I will here notice, (what I have omitted in the 'Horæ Paulinæ') the similarity of style in the Gospel and Epistle of John; a similarity, not so much in narrative, as in reflections. Now, if the identity of the writer of the Gospel and Epistle be clearly made out, none can fail to perceive the value of the Gospel narrative, coming from the pen of one, who in the Epistle (i. 1.) thus expresses himself: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have looked on, and our hands have handled, of the word of life,—we declare unto you.'

CHAPTER VIII.

The History of the Resurrection.

The history of the resurrection of Christ is a part of the evidence of Christianity; but its value, as a head of evidence, is not generally understood. It is not valuable merely as a miracle, either greater or better attested, than many others; but as a fact, on which the whole religion not only rests now, but on which it has rested from the very first. This it was that the first Christians preached; and which we should know for certain that they did preach, had the Gospels been lost, or never written. Every writing from that age to the present, genuine or spurious, concur in representing the history of the resurrection as an article of history received without doubt by all who called themselves Christians. In the other parts of the Gospel narrative, a question may arise, dependent on the genuineness of the records, whether the things related of Christ be the very things which the

apostles and first teachers of Christianity gave out concerning him. But on the subject of the resurrection, no such doubt can remain. The only consideration is, whether the apostles were deceived, or knowingly published a falsehood. The latter supposition is scarcely possible. No men have thus done and suffered to propagate as true what they knew to be false. The more natural solution would be, that the disciples were deluded by their enthusiasm, to confound the story of Christ's resurrection with the stories of the apparitions of other dead men. But this solution is at variance with the fact, that Christ was seen not by one, but many; by night and by day; not only at a distance, but near; that they who saw him not only conversed with him, but even examined his person to satisfy their doubts. These last particulars, it is true, stand on the credit of our records alone. But as it is admitted that the resurrection of Christ was asserted by his disciples from the beginning, the origin of that assertion cannot be attributed to enthusiasm merely, unless the parties, who insinuate such a ground for deception, can also account for the disappearance of the body. Now, that the body was missing is plain, from the very report spread by the Jews, that the followers of Christ had stolen it away.¹ But this account, though loaded with great improbabilities,² such as the difficulty of the attempt,³ and the dread of the consequences of failure, is the only credible account that could be given of the

¹ See Matth. xxviii. 15.

² It has been rightly observed by Townshend (Dissert. on the Res. p. 126.) that the story of the guards carried collusion on the face of it:—'His disciples came by night and stole him away, while we slept.' Men in their circumstances would not have made such an acknowledgment of their negligence, without previous assurances of protection and impunity.

³ 'Especially at the full moon, the city full of people, many probably passing the whole night, as Jesus and his disciples had done, in the open air; the sepulchre so near the city as to be now enclosed within the walls.' Priestley on the Resurrection, p. 24.

matter. Since, then, the body did disappear, it is useless to ground the belief of the resurrection on enthusiasm alone; for no enthusiasm could lead a person to believe that the body was not there, if it were there bodily; nor could the senses be so deceived in objects of touch, in which there is no mistake. All other accounts of apparitions leave the body quiet in the grave; and though the body might be removed by fraud, yet no such attempt would be made by men, who looked to a real resurrection as the ground of their future hopes, and still less by men who had no such hopes to look to. The presence and absence of the dead body are alike inconsistent with the supposition of enthusiasm; for if present, it must have cured their enthusiasm; if absent, fraud, not enthusiasm, must have conveyed it away.

But if we admit, on the concurrent testimony of all the histories, that the religion of Jesus was set up at the very place where he was buried, and where it was asserted that, after such burial, he rose again, it is evident that the story would have been stifled in its very birth had the Jews been able to produce the body; a step, they would, if they could, have taken the more readily, as they were fully alive to the effect which the story of the resurrection would, unless disproved, produce; and to prevent the accomplishment of which, by a fraud on the part of the disciples, they took every precaution; a precaution perfectly at variance with their assertion that the disciples were such enthusiasts, that they would be deluded by a resurrection not real.

CHAPTER IX.

The Propagation of Christianity.

In this argument we have to consider in what degree, within what time, and to what extent, Christianity was propagated.

Now it appears, that a few days after Christ's ascen-

Paley Evid.

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sion, about 120 disciples met at Jerusalem.¹ This number, was, we are told, on a signal display of divine agency about ten days after, increased to 3000.² We are not, however, to understand that the whole 3000 were converted by the miracle; but that many, who were silently believers in Christ, now publicly professed their faith, and enrolled themselves into a society for the propagation of the Christian religion.

This number was soon increased to 5000,³ exclusive of many, probably, who, though Christians in heart, had not the heart to join the society till they saw what was likely to become of it. Of this description of persons was probably Gamaliel,⁴ and, perhaps, also, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea; of whom it might probably be said, that though they believed, they did not confess their faith, from the dread of losing their seat in the synagogue,⁵ and all that was dear to them in life, and even life itself.

Shortly after, we read of multitudes of men and women being added to the Lord,⁶ and of a still further increase amongst both the Jews and Gentiles;⁷ and, again, that the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.⁸

Thus, then, in the space of less than two years from the death of Christ, the Christian converts amounted to 5000. This I consider as the first period in the propagation of Christianity. During the second, which comprises the next four years, in consequence of a persecution raised against the church at Jerusalem, the converts were driven from the city; but, dispersing themselves through Judea and Samaria, they 'preached every where the word.'⁹

Hitherto the promulgation of the new religion was

¹ Acts i. 15.

⁴ Acts v. 34.

⁶ Acts v. 14.

⁹ Acts viii. 4.

² Acts ii. 1.

⁵ See John xii. 43.

⁷ Acts vi. 1.

³ Acts iv. 4.

⁸ Acts vi. 7.

confined to the countries just mentioned :¹ for it was not known to the apostles, that they were at liberty to preach the religion to mankind at large, until this fact was revealed to Peter by an especial miracle. Hence, it happened that the Gospel was not preached to the Gentiles at Cesarea till about seven years after Christ's ascension. A year after, a multitude of Gentiles were converted at Antioch. On Herod's death, in the next year, it is observed, that 'the word of God grew and multiplied.' Three years from this time, on the preaching of Paul at Iconium, 'a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed : ' and afterward he is represented as 'making many disciples ' at Derbe, a principal city in the same district. Three years after this, the apostles wrote a public letter from Jerusalem to the Gentile converts in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, with which letter Paul travelled, and found the churches 'established in the faith, and increasing in number daily.' From Asia he proceeded into Greece, and we find him at Thessalonica and Berea ; at both of which cities his success was considerable. The next year and a half of St. Paul's ministry was spent at Corinth, where 'many of the Corinthians believed and were baptised.' Within less than a year after his departure from Corinth, St. Paul fixed himself at Ephesus for more than two years ; during which time the word of God 'mightily grew and prevailed ;'² and at the end of that period we find that not only at Ephesus, but throughout all Asia, Paul had turned away from the national worship much people.³ In addition to this, mention is made of converts at Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Cyprus, Cyrene, Macedonia, and Philippi.

This, then, is the third period in the propagation of

¹ Respecting the conversion of the Jews, Bryant has the following remark, which seems to be well founded : 'There is reason to think, that more Jews were converted by the apostles in one day, than have been won over in the last thousand years.' See his *Truth of the Christian Religion*, p. 112.

² Acts xix. 20.

³ Acts xix. 26.

Christianity, ending at the 28th year after the ascension; so that, in the space of less than 30 years, Christianity had spread itself through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, almost all the districts of the Lesser Asia, through Greece, and the islands of the Ægean Sea, the coast of Africa, and had extended itself to Rome. During all this time, Jerusalem continued not only the centre of the mission, but a principal seat of the religion, where many myriads (ten thousands) were residing, who had believed.¹

On this abstract the following observations may be made.

I. That the account comes from a person, who was himself concerned in a portion of what he relates, and contemporary with the whole of it; who visited Jerusalem, and frequented the society of those who acted the chief parts in the transaction. I lay down this point positively; for the unaffectedness and simplicity, with which the author notes his presence on certain occasions, are sufficient to prove that, whoever he was, he actually lived in the times, and occupied the situation, which he represents himself to have held.

II. That this is a very incomplete account of the propagation of Christianity; I mean, that, if the history be true, more than what the history contains must be true also. For, though the narrative is entitled the Acts of the Apostles, it is in fact a history of the twelve apostles only during a short time of their continuing at Jerusalem; and even of this period the account is very concise. The work afterward consists of a few important passages of Peter's ministry, of the speech and death of Stephen, of the preaching of Philip the deacon; and the sequel of the volume is taken up with the conversion, travels, discourses, and history of Paul; in which large portions of time are often passed over with very scanty notice.

III. That the account, so far as it goes, is for this

¹ Acts xxi. 20.

reason more credible. Had it been the author's design to display the early progress of Christianity, he would have collected, or set forth, accounts of the preaching of the rest of the apostles; who cannot be supposed to have remained silent, inactive, and unsuccessful.

IV. That the intimations of the number of converts, and of the success of the preaching of the apostles, come out for the most part incidentally; and consequently the narrative is free from the suspicion of a design to exaggerate or deceive.

Parallel testimonies with the history are the letters of St. Paul, and of the other apostles, which have come down to us. Those of St Paul are addressed to the churches of Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Galatia, and, if the inscription be right, of Ephesus; his ministry at all which places is recorded in the history: and to the churches of Colosse and Laodicea jointly, which he had not then visited. They recognise by reference the churches of Judea, of Asia, and 'all the churches of the Gentiles.'¹ In the Epistle to the Romans,² we read that the Gentiles became obedient 'through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.' In the Epistle to the Colossians,³ we find an oblique, but very strong signification of the then general state of the Christian mission: 'If ye be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven;' which Gospel was present with them, as it was 'in all the world.'⁴ The expressions, it is true, are hyperbolical; but they are hyperboles which could only be used by a writer who entertained a strong sense of the subject. The first epi-

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 14.

² Col. i. 23.

³ Rom. xv. 18, 19.

⁴ Col. i. 6.

stle of Peter addresses the Christians dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

We are next to consider how far these accounts are confirmed by other evidence.

In the passage of Tacitus, quoted already, (see page 13.) mention is made of 'a great many Christians,' who were apprehended on the charge of setting fire to Rome, during Nero's reign; and with regard to the temporary check, which Tacitus says Christianity received, it is probable that he alludes to the persecution which followed the death of St. Stephen, as related in Acts viii. 1.

Next in order of time, and perhaps superior in importance, is the testimony of Pliny the younger; who, when governor of Pontus and Bithynia, wrote, not quite 80 years after Christ's ascension, his letter to Trajan, noticed above (see page 14.); whence it appears, that such had been the exertions of the Christians in propagating their religion, that the temples had been forsaken, the sacred rites neglected, and victims for the altars had become no longer saleable. The number, therefore, of the Christians must have been considerable to effect such a change; and, what is very remarkable, some of those who were put on their trial, said they had been Christians for 20 years preceding. Besides, by using the word 'Christians,' it is plain that Pliny spoke of a sect well known to the Roman emperor, or else he would have described the persons as a sect called Christians. Now, as Bithynia and Pontus were at a great distance from Judea, the new religion must have been propagated with great industry and success, to be able not only to reach those parts of the empire, but even to be found in cities, villages, and the open country, and to effect a change in the religion of the state. Until, then, some reason be assigned, why the Christians should be more numerous in Pontus and Bithynia than elsewhere, we may fairly consider Pliny's letter as evidence in confirmation of

the accounts given by Christian writers, of that and succeeding ages, of the general state of Christianity.

Justin Martyr, who wrote about 30 years after Pliny, says, 'There is no nation, Greek or barbarian, or even of those who wander in tribes, and live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the Universe by the name of the crucified Jesus.'¹ Tertullian, who comes 50 years after Justin, thus appeals to the Roman governors: 'We were but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, islands, towns, and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum.'² I allow that these expressions are declamatory: but even declamation has its bounds; and this public boasting on a subject known to every reader, would have been useless, unless it had been notorious that great multitudes of Christians were to be found in most parts of the Roman empire.

In another passage Tertullian thus speaks of the number of Christians in the several countries where the new faith prevailed:—'Although our multitude is so great, that in almost every city we form the greater part, we pass our time modestly and in silence.'³ Clemens Alexandrinus, who preceded Tertullian a few years, compares the success of Christianity, and that of the most celebrated philosophical institutions.⁴ Origen, who follows Tertullian at the distance of only 30 years, delivers nearly the same account.

It is well known, that within 80 years after this, the Roman empire became Christian under Constantine: and it is probable, that Constantine declared himself on the side of the Christians, because they were the powerful party; for Arnobius, who wrote immediately before Constantine's accession, speaks of the diffusion of Christ's doctrine throughout all countries; of men of the greatest genius having come over to the

¹ Dial. cum Tryph.

² Ad Scap. c. 111.

³ Tertull. Apol. c. 37.

⁴ Clem. Al. Strom. lib. vi. ad fin.

institution, in the face of threats and tortures.¹ And 20 years after Constantine's possession of the empire, Julius Firmicus Maternus calls on the emperors Constantius and Constans to extirpate the relics of the ancient religion.² Fifty years afterward, Jerom represents the decline of Paganism in language, which conveys the same idea of its approaching extinction.³ But though he indulges in a triumph, natural to a zealous friend of the cause, he testifies plainly to the consent with which he saw the religion received. 'But now,' says he, 'the passion and resurrection of Christ are celebrated in the discourses and writings of all nations, who firmly believe the immortality of the soul, and future recompenses, which the greatest philosophers had before denied, or doubted or perplexed with their disputes. The fierceness of Thracians and Scythians is now softened by the gentle sound of the Gospel; and every where Christ is all in all.'⁴ Were, therefore, the motives of Constantine's conversion ever so problematical, the easy establishment of Christianity, and the ruin of heathenism, under him and his immediate successors, is of itself a proof of the progress which Christianity had made in the preceding period.

It may help to convey to us some notion of the progress of Christianity, or rather of the character and quality of the learning and labors of many early Christians, to notice the number of Christian writers who flourished in these ages. St. Jerom's catalogue contains 66 writers within the first three centuries, and the first six years of the fourth; and 54 between that time and his own, viz. A.D. 392. and he introduces his catalogue with the following just remonstrance:—
'Let those who say the church has had no philoso-

¹ Arnob. in Gentes, l. i. p. 9. 24. 27. 42. 44. edit. Lug. Bat. 1650.

² It will not be thought that we quote this writer in order to recommend his temper or his judgment, but to show the comparative state of Christianity and of heathenism at this period.

³ Jer ad Lect. ep. 5. 7.

⁴ Jer. ep. 8. ad Heliod.

phers, nor eloquent and learned men, observe who and what they were who founded, established, and adorned it.'¹ Of these writers, several, as Justin, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Bardesanes, Hippolytus, Eusebius, were voluminous writers. Christian writers abounded particularly about the year 178. Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, founded a library in that city, A. D. 212. Pamphilus, the friend of Origen, founded a library at Cesarea, A. D. 294. Public defences were also set forth, by various advocates, in the course of the first three centuries. Within 100 years after Christ's ascension, Quadratus and Aristides, whose works, except some fragments of the first, are lost, and, about 20 years afterward, Justin Martyr, whose works remain, presented apologies for the Christian religion to the Roman emperors; Quadratus and Aristides to Adrian, Justin to Antoninus Pius, and a second one to Marcus Antoninus. Melito, bishop of Sardis, and Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, and Miltiades, did the same to Marcus Antoninus, 20 years afterward:² and 10 years after, Apollonius, who suffered martyrdom under Commodus, composed an apology for his faith, which he read in the senate, and which was afterwards published.³ Fourteen years after, Tertullian addressed his apology, which now remains, to the Roman governors of provinces; and, about the same time, Minucius Felix composed a defence of the Christian religion, still extant; and, shortly after the conclusion of this century, copious defences of Christianity were published by Arnobius and Lactantius.

SECTION II.

Reflections on the preceding Account.

In viewing the progress of Christianity, our atten-

¹ Jer. Prol. in Lib. de Scr. Eccl.

² Euseb. Hist. lib. iv. c. 26. See also Lardner, vol. ii. p. 666.

³ Lardner, vol. ii. p. 687.

tion is due, 1. to the number of converts at Jerusalem, immediately after its Founder's death; because this success was at the time, and on the spot, when and where the chief part of the history had been transacted; 2. to the early establishment of numerous Christian societies in Judea and Galilee, the scene of Christ's miracles and ministry, and where the memory of the events, and the knowledge of the facts, must have yet been fresh and certain; 3. to the success the apostles and their companions met with, at the several places to which they came, in consequence of the credit given to witnesses appealing to what themselves had seen and heard; and which effect of their preaching strongly confirms the truth of what our history positively and circumstantially relates, that they were able to exhibit supernatural attestations of their mission. Lastly, to the subsequent spread of the religion, of which we receive successive intimations, and satisfactory, though general and occasional accounts, until its full and final establishment.

In all these stages, the history is without a parallel. We have not now been tracing the progress, and describing the prevalency, of an opinion, founded on physical facts or metaphysical reasoning, but of a system, the very basis of which was a supernatural character ascribed to a particular person; and of a doctrine, whose truth depends entirely on the truth of a miracle then recently done. 'To establish a new religion,' says Jortin, 'even amongst a few people, is a thing exceedingly difficult. To reform some corruptions which may have spread in a religion, is not perhaps so hard, when the principal part of that religion is preserved entire; and yet this often cannot be accomplished without an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances. But to introduce a new way of thinking and acting, and to persuade many nations to quit the religion of their ancestors, and to make them forsake the deities which they had been accustomed to worship; this is a work of the greatest difficulty; for the

resistance of education, worldly policy, and superstition, is almost invincible.'

Although men, in these days, may be Christians in consequence of education, in submission to authority, or in compliance with fashion, the first race of Christians, as well as millions who succeeded them, became such in formal opposition to all these motives. Every argument, therefore, which sets forth the almost irresistible effects of the prejudice of education, confirms in fact the evidence of Christianity.

But to judge of the argument, drawn from the early propagation of Christianity, let us compare its success with that of the Christian missions in modern times. For instance, in the East India mission, supported by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, we hear sometimes of 40 being baptised in the course of a year, and these principally children; but of adult converts the number is extremely small; and even after the labor of 200 years, there are not 12,000¹ Indian Christians, and those almost entirely of the lowest caste. Now, though I lament as much as any man, this little success of the missionaries, I cannot but see in it a proof of the divine origin of Christianity. What had the apostles to assist them in the propagation of their faith which the missionaries have not? Intrinsically, the excellence of the religion in the purity of its precepts and the benignity of its spirit is the same now as then, and, therefore, likely to meet with equal reception; while in both the missionaries and apostles was to be found piety, zeal, and a blameless life; and on the score of education, the modern preachers are even superior to the ancient, not only absolutely, but relatively, in comparison with those amongst whom they exercise their ministry.

¹ This computation is taken from 'Sketches relating to the history, learning, and manners of the Hindoos,' p. 48. quoted by Dr. Robertson, Hist. Dis. concerning ancient India, p. 236.

In like manner, the circumstances of character, under which the missionaries appear, are all in their favor. They come from a people whom the Indian world view with respect; while the apostles appeared to the Gentiles in the character of despised Jews. If it be disgraceful in India to become a Christian, it would not have been less so at a time when the Christians were considered the scum of society. If the religion which the apostles and missionaries had to encounter respectively be considered, the difference will be found to be but little. The power of Jupiter, of Neptune, of Æolus, of Mars, and of Venus, in the western mythology, are ascribed in the eastern to the agency of Agrio, the god of fire; Varoon, the god of the ocean; Vayoo, the god of wind; and Cama, the god of love.¹ The sacred rites of polytheism in the west were gay and licentious, and those in the east were of the same character; for not only in the temples, but even in public processions, were seen grown-up girls, taught by the priests to dance and sing, with gestures and words equally indecent, to the glory of their idol-god.²

Nor was there much difference on the ground of prejudices in favor of an established religion. In the west, it was incorporated with the state, where the magistrate was the chief priest, and the highest civil officers took the most distinguished part in the celebration of the holy rites. In the east, a powerful caste possess exclusively the administration of public worship, and are of course attached to its interest. In both, the mythology, the groundwork of the reli-

¹ Baghvat Geeta, p. 94. quoted by Robertson, Ind. Dis. pag. 306.

² Other deities of the East are of an austere and gloomy character, to be propitiated by human sacrifices, and by voluntary torments of the most excruciating kind.—*Voyage de Gentil*. vol. i. p. 244—260. Preface to Code of Gentoo Laws, p. 57. quoted by Robertson, p. 320.

gion, was carried back to an antiquity far beyond the age of credible history; and while in both the great bulk of the people believed superstitions equally absurd, and practised rites equally unhallowed, the fewer philosophers of either community derided religion, or upheld it only for the sake of its political uses.¹

But, granting that the ancient heathens believed in their religion less generally than the modern Indians do in theirs, still this would have given the apostles no advantage over the missionaries, in propagating their creed; for a disbelief in one religion disposes the mind rather to reject all creeds than to receive any. Infidelity is the hardest soil the propagators of a new religion can have to work on.

We have hitherto directed our attention to the English missionaries in India; but the same want of success has been experienced by some Moravian missionaries in their attempts to convert the Greenlanders, during a period of thirty years, and doubtless from the same cause; the feebleness and inadequacy of human means to produce such a revolution in the habits, feelings, and opinions of people, on the subject of religion.

The only conclusion, therefore, that can be drawn from the success of the apostles, and the failure of the missionaries, is, that the first possessed means of conviction which the latter did not; and that the apostles had miracles to appeal to, for the want of which, in Greenland especially, the missionaries could do nothing.²

SECTION III.

Of the Religion of Mahomet.

The only event in the history of the world, which admits of comparison with the propagation of Chris-

¹ See Robertson's Ind. Diss. p. 324.

² See History of Greenland, ii. p. 376.

tianity, is the success of Mahometanism. The Mahometan institution was rapid in its progress, recent in its history, and founded on a supernatural character assumed by its author. In these points, the resemblance with Christianity is confessed; but there are others, which separate the two cases entirely.

1. Mahomet did not found his pretensions on miracles, capable of being known and attested by others. This assertion is supported by the Koran itself, in which Mahomet not only does not affect the power of working miracles, but expressly disclaims it. Thus we read, 'The infidel says, Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his lord, he will not believe: Answer; Signs are in the power of God alone, and I am no more than a public preacher. Is it not sufficient for them, that we have sent the Koran to be read to them?'¹ Besides this acknowledgment, I have observed 14 places, in which Mahomet puts the same objection into the mouth of the unbeliever, in not one of which does he allege a miracle in reply. His answer is, 'that God giveth the power of working miracles, when and to whom he pleaseth';² 'that if he should work miracles, they would not believe';³ 'that they had before rejected Moses, and Jesus, and the prophets, who wrought miracles';⁴ 'that the Koran itself was a miracle.'⁵

The only place in the Koran, in which it can be pretended that a 'sensible' miracle is referred to (for the secret visitations of Gabriel, the night journey of Mahomet to heaven, or the presence in battle of invisible angels, do not deserve the name of sensible miracles), is in the words of ch. liv.—'the hour of judgment approacheth, and the moon splits in sunder.' But the Mahometan expositors disagree in their interpretation of this passage; some explaining

¹ Sale's Koran, c. xxix. p. 328. ed. 4to.

² Ibid. v. x. xiii. twice.

³ ch. vi.

⁴ ch. iii. xxi. xxviii.

⁵ ch. xvi.

the 'splitting of the moon,' as one of the future signs of the day of judgment; others referring it to a miraculous appearance, which had then taken place.

After these authentic confessions of the Koran, we are not to be moved with miraculous stories related of Mahomet by Abulfeda, who wrote his life about 600 years after his death; or which are found in the legend of Al-Jannabi, who came 200 years later. On the contrary, from comparing Mahomet's own language with the reports of his followers, the fair conclusion is, that when the religion was established by conquest, then, and not till then, came out the stories of his miracles.

Now this difference alone constitutes a bar to all reasoning from one case to the other. The success of a religion founded on a miraculous history, shows the credit which was given to the history. Where a miraculous history is not alleged, no such credit can be shown. We admit, that multitudes acknowledged the pretensions of Mahomet: but, as these pretensions were destitute of miraculous evidence, the grounds, on which they were acknowledged, could not be secure grounds of persuasion to his followers, nor their example any authority to us. Admit the whole of Mahomet's authentic history, so far as it was capable of being witnessed by others, to be true, and Mahomet might still be an impostor, or enthusiast, or both. Admit to be true any part of Christ's public history, and he must have come from God. Where miracles are not alleged, the progress of a religion is no better argument of its truth, than the prevalency of any system of opinions in morality or physics is a proof of the truth of those opinions. And we know that this argument is inadmissible in any branch of philosophy whatever.

But it will be said, If one religion could make its way without miracles, why might not another? To which I reply, that the question is not whether a reli-

gious institution could be set up without miracles, but whether a religion, or change of religion, professing to found itself in miracles, could succeed without any reality to rest on? These two cases are very different; and Mahomet's not taking this course is one proof that the thing is difficult, if not impossible, to be accomplished without the aid of miracles; of which, though Mahomet repeatedly disclaims the power of working them himself, he knew the value, as he incessantly refers to the miracles of preceding prophets. To hear some men talk, the setting up of a religion by miraculous pretences appears a thing of every day's experience; whereas, with the exception of the Jewish and Christian religion, there is no well authenticated account of any such thing having been accomplished.

II. The establishment of Mahomet's religion was effected by causes in no degree appertaining to the origin of Christianity.

During the first 12 years of his mission, Mahomet had recourse only to persuasion; and there is sufficient reason to believe, that, if he had confined himself to this mode of propagating his religion, we should never have heard either of him or it. 'Three years were silently employed in the conversion of 14 proselytes. For ten years, the religion advanced slowly within the walls of Mecca. The number of proselytes, in the seventh year of his mission, may be estimated by the absence of 83 men and eighteen women, who retired to Ethiopia.'¹ Yet even this progress was aided by important advantages, which Mahomet found in his situation, in his mode of conducting his design, and in his doctrine.

1. Mahomet was the grandson of the most powerful family in Mecca; and though his father had not left him a patrimony suitable to his birth, he had repaired this deficiency by an opulent marriage. A person

¹ Gibbon's Hist. vol. ix. p. 244, &c.

considerable by his wealth, high descent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, taking on himself the character of a religious teacher, would not fail of attracting attention and followers.

2. Mahomet conducted his design, in the outset especially, with great art and prudence. His first application gained him his wife's uncle, a considerable person in Mecca, together with his cousin Ali, afterward the celebrated caliph, then a youth of great expectation, and even already distinguished by his attachment, impetuosity, and courage.¹ He next expressed himself to Abu Becr, a man amongst the first of the Koreish in wealth and influence, whose interest and example drew in 25 other principal persons in Mecca. This was the work of three years; during which time every thing was transacted in secret. On the strength of these allies, and under the powerful protection of his family, Mahomet commenced his public preaching. The advance he made during the nine or ten years of his peaceable ministry, was only such as, with these advantages, might reasonably have been expected, especially when he had no prejudices arising from an established religion to contend with.

3. The Arabs deduced their descent from Abraham through the line of Ishmael. The inhabitants of Mecca acknowledged, as may be collected from the Koran, one supreme Deity, but had associated with him many objects of idolatrous worship. The doctrine, with which Mahomet set out, was the exclusive unity of God. He told them, Abraham, Ishmael, Moses, and Jesus, had all asserted the same thing: that their followers had universally corrupted the truth, and that

¹ Of which Gibbon has preserved the following specimen:—
 ‘When Mahomet called out in an assembly of his family, Who among you will be my companion and my vizir? Ali, then only in the 14th year of his age, suddenly replied, O prophet!—I am the man; whosoever riseth against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O prophet! I will be thy vizir over them.’ Vol. ix. p. 245.

he was now commissioned to restore it to the world. A doctrine so specious, and authorised by names held in the highest veneration by his hearers, could scarcely fail, in the hands of a powerful missionary, to prevail, to the extent in which Mahomet succeeded by his pacific ministry.

4. Of the institution, which Mahomet joined with this doctrine, and of the Koran, in which that institution is delivered; we discover two purposes, to make converts, and to make his converts soldiers; as the following particulars tend to prove:—

1. When Mahomet began to preach to the Jews, Christians, and Arabs, he said that the religion he taught was only what their own had been originally; —‘ We believe in God, and that which hath been sent down unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and which was delivered unto Moses and Jesus, and unto the prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between any of them.’¹ ‘ He hath ordained you the religion which he commanded Noah, and which we have revealed unto thee, O Mohammed; and which we commanded Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus, saying, Observe this religion, and be not divided therein.’²

2. The author of the Koran never ceases from describing the future anguish of unbelievers: and as these descriptions are conceived in terms very impressive, they would scarce fail to operate with great force on the mind, through the terror they seem well calculated to inspire.

3. On the other hand, his voluptuous paradise, his robes of silk, his palaces of marble, his groves and couches, his wines, his dainties; and, above all, his 72 virgins of resplendent beauty and eternal youth assigned to each of the faithful, intoxicated the imaginations of his Eastern followers.

4. But Mahomet’s highest heaven was reserved for

Sale’s Koran, c. ii. p. 17.

² Ibid. c. xlii. p. 393.

those who fought his battles, or expended their fortunes in his cause. 'God has indeed promised Paradise to every believer; but God has preferred those who fight for the faith, before those who sit still, by degrees of honor conferred on them from him, and by granting them forgiveness and mercy.'¹ Again; 'Do ye reckon the giving drink to the pilgrims, and the visiting of the holy temple, to be actions as meritorious as those performed by him who believeth in God and the last day, and fighteth for the religion of God? They shall not be held equal with God.'²

5. His doctrine of predestination was applied by him to the same purpose of exalting the courage of his adherents. 'If any thing of other matters had happened to us, we had not been slain here. Answer: If ye had been in your houses, verily they would have gone forth to fight, whose slaughter was decreed, to the places where they died.'³

6. In warm regions, the appetite of the sexes is ardent, the passion for inebriating liquors moderate. In compliance with this distinction, although Mahomet laid a restraint on the drinking of wine, in the use of women he allowed an almost unbounded indulgence. How different this from the unaccommodating purity of the Gospel! How would Mahomet have succeeded with the Christian lesson in his mouth,—'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart?' It must be added, that Mahomet did not venture on the prohibition of wine, till the seven-

¹ Sale's Koran, c. iv. p. 73.

² 'The sword,' said Mahomet, 'is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months fasting or prayer. Whoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven at the day of judgment; his wounds shall be resplendent as vermillion, and odoriferous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim.'—See Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 256.

³ Sale's Koran, c. iii. p. 54.

teenth year of his mission,¹ when his military successes had completely established his authority. The same observation holds of the fast of the Ramadan,² and of the most laborious part of his institution, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

What has hitherto been collected from the records of Mahomet, relates to the twelve or thirteen years of his peaceable preaching; which part alone of his life admits of the smallest comparison with the origin of Christianity. A new scene is now unfolded. The city of Medina was at that time distracted by the hereditary contentions of two hostile tribes. These feuds were exasperated by the mutual persecutions of the Jews and Christians, by whom the city was inhabited.³ The religion of Mahomet presented, in some measure, a point of union to these divided opinions. It embraced the principles which were common to them all. To the Pagan Arab, imbued with the sentiments and knowledge of his Jewish or Christian fellow-citizen, it offered no offensive theology. This recommendation procured to Mahometanism a more favorable reception at Medina, than its author had been able, by twelve years painful endeavors, to obtain at Mecca. Yet the progress of the religion was inconsiderable: his missionary could only collect a congregation of forty persons.⁴ It was not a religious, but a political association which ultimately introduced Mahomet into Medina. Harassed and disgusted by the long continuance of factions and disputes, the inhabitants of that city saw, in the admission of the prophet's authority, a rest from the miseries which they had suffered, and a suppression of the violence which they had learned to condemn. After an embassy, therefore, composed of believers and un-

¹ Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 126.

² Ibid. p. 112.

³ Ibid. p. 100.

⁴ Ibid. p. 85.

believers,¹ and of persons of both tribes, with whom a treaty was concluded of strict alliance and support, Mahomet made his public entry, and was received as the sovereign of Medina.

Soon after this time, the impostor changed his language and conduct. With a town at his command, to arm his party, and to head them with security, he pretended that a divine commission was given him to attack the infidels, and to set up the true faith by the sword.² An early victory over a very superior force established the renown of his arms, and of his personated character.³ Every year was marked by battles or assassinations; and such was the activity of Mahomet, that, in the nine following years, he commanded in person in eight general engagements,⁴ and undertook, by himself or his lieutenants, fifty military enterprises.

From this time we have nothing left to account for, but that Mahomet should collect a victorious army, and that his religion should proceed with his conquests. The ordinary experience of human affairs leaves us little to wonder at in either of these effects; both of which were further assisted by peculiar facilities. The roving Arabs crowded round the standard of religion and of plunder united. Beside the highly painted joys of a carnal paradise, Mahomet rewarded his followers in this world with a liberal division of the spoils, and with the persons of their female captives.⁵ Arabia, occupied by small independent tribes, was exposed to the impression, and yielded to the progress, of a firm and resolute army; while the weakness of the Roman provinces on the north and the west, and the distracted state of the Persian empire on the east, facilitated the invasion of neighboring countries. That Mahomet's conquests should carry

¹ Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 85.

² Ib. p. 88.

³ Vict. of Bedr, ib. p. 106.

⁴ Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 255.

⁵ Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 255.

his religion with them, will excite little surprise; when we know that death or conversion was the only choice offered to idolaters. 'Kill the idolaters, wheresoever ye shall find them!'¹ To the Jews and Christians was left the milder alternative of subjection and tribute, if they persisted in their own religion; or of an equal participation in the honors and privileges of the faithful, if they embraced that of their conquerors. The corrupted state of Christianity in the seventh century unhappily so fell in with men's care of their safety and fortunes, as to induce many to forsake its profession. Add to which, that Mahomet's victories not only operated by the natural effect of conquest, but were constantly represented, both to friends and foes, as divine declarations in his favor. Success was evidence. 'Ye slew not,' says he, after the battle of Bedr, 'those who were slain at Bedr, but God slew them. If ye desire a decision of the matter between us, now hath a decision come unto you.'²

The success of Mahometanism during this, and every future period of its history, bears so little resemblance to the early propagation of Christianity, that no inference can justly be drawn from it to the prejudice of the Christian argument. For what are we comparing? A Galilean peasant accompanied by a few fishermen, with a conqueror at the head of his army. We compare Jesus, without one external circumstance of attraction or influence, prevailing against the prejudices and power, the religious opinions and rites, the philosophy and authority of the Roman empire, in its most polished and enlightened period; with Mahomet, making his way amongst Arabs, collecting followers in the midst of triumphs, in the darkest ages and countries of the world, and when success in arms, the work of mere man, was considered as a sure testimony of divine approbation. That multitudes, per-

¹ Sale's Koran, c. ix. p. 149.

² Ib. c. viii. p. 141.

sueded by this argument, should join the train of a victorious chief, and bow before irresistible power, is a conduct in which we cannot see much to surprise us; and nothing that resembles the causes by which the establishment of Christianity was effected.

The success, therefore, of Mahometanism stands not in the way of this important conclusion; that the propagation of Christianity, under the circumstances in which it was propagated, is unique in the history of the species. A Jewish peasant overthrew the religion of the world.

I have, nevertheless, placed the prevalency of the religion amongst the auxiliary arguments of its truth; because, whether it had prevailed or not, or whether its prevalency can or cannot be accounted for, the direct argument remains still. It is still true, that a number of men, personally connected with the history and with the author of the religion, were induced by what they heard, and saw, and knew, not only to change their former opinions, but to commit themselves to dangers, and undergo difficulties, solely in consequence, and in support, of their belief of facts, which, if true, establish the truth of the religion; but which, if false, they must have known to be so.

PART III.

A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF SOME POPULAR
OBJECTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

The Discrepancies between the several Gospels.

I know not a more rash or unphilosophical conduct of the understanding, than to reject the substance of a story, in consequence of a diversity in the circumstances with which it is related. The usual character of human testimony is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. When accounts of a transaction come from the mouths of different witnesses, it is easy to pick out apparent or real inconsistencies between them. But though these are studiously displayed by a pleader, they produce little impression on the mind of a judge. On the contrary, a close and minute agreement induces the suspicion of confederacy and fraud. When written histories touch on the same scenes of action, the comparison almost always affords ground for a like reflection. At one time, numerous and important variations present themselves; sometimes even absolute and final contradictions; yet neither the one nor the other are deemed sufficient to shake the credibility of the main facts. The embassy of the Jews to deprecate the execution of Caligula's order to place his statue in their temple, Philo places in harvest, Josephus in seed-time; both contemporary writers. No reader is led by this inconsistency to doubt, whether such an embassy was sent, or whether such an order was given. When, therefore, it is contended,¹ that, as the different hours

¹ See Middleton's *Reflections answered* by Benson, *Hist. Christ.* iii. 50.

of the day, assigned to the crucifixion by John and the other evangelists, do not admit of the reconciliation which learned men have proposed, we must leave the difficulty chargeable with manifest inconsistency; I reply, that such discrepancy cannot impeach the fact, that Christ was crucified on the day asserted.

Much of the discrepancy in the Gospels arises from a fact or a passage of Christ's life being noticed by one writer, and not by another. Now, omission is an uncertain ground of objection. There are many particulars mentioned by Josephus in his *Antiquities*, which ought to have been noticed in the Jewish Wars. Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius, have written of Tiberius. Each has mentioned things omitted by the rest; yet no objection is taken to the truth of what each does relate.

But these discrepancies will be more numerous when men write memoirs, such as the Gospels are, and do not undertake to give a regular account of all things of importance, but only of such actions and discourses as occurred to their recollection, or were suggested by the particular design of their writing.

This design may appear only occasionally. Thus the design which St. Matthew had, whilst writing of the resurrection, was to attest the performance of Christ's promise to his disciples to go before them into Galilee: because he alone, except Mark, (who took it from him) has recorded this promise, and confined his narrative to that single appearance. As the preconcerted manifestation of our Lord's person, it was the thing which dwelt chiefly on Matthew's mind, and he adapted his narrative to it. But, that there is nothing in Matthew which necessarily imports that the appearance in Galilee was the first or only appearance, is evident from Mark, who uses the same terms concerning the appearance as Matthew does, yet records two other appearances prior to this: (xvi. 7.) whence

we might infer, that this was the first time they were to see him : yet the historian did not perceive that he was leading to any such conclusion ; for, shortly after, he informs us of two appearances, which, by comparing the order of events, must have been prior to the appearance in Galilee.

Probably, the same observation, concerning the particular design which guided the historian, may be of use in comparing many other passages of the Gospels.

CHAPTER II.

Erroneous Opinions imputed to the Apostles.

A species of candor, shown towards other books, is sometimes refused to the Scriptures ; and that is, the placing a distinction between judgment and testimony. We do not usually question a writer, delivering an opinion on subjects connected or unconnected with his proofs : we separate facts from opinions, and narrative from argument.

To apply this equitable consideration to the Christian records, objection has been raised on the ground of the quotations of the Old Testament found in the New ; some of which are applied in a sense different from the original. Many of those quotations were intended only as ‘accommodations,’ i. e. they quoted what suited with the occasion before them, without asserting that a similar occasion was in the view of the original author. Such accommodations, especially from books in every one’s hands, are common with all writers ; but in none, perhaps, to be more expected than in the writings of the Jews, whose literature was almost confined to their Scriptures. Those prophecies, however, which are accompanied with a declaration, that they originally respected the event then related, are truly alleged. But were it otherwise, is the judgment of the writers of the New Testament, in interpreting the Old, so connected with their veracity, that a cri-

tical mistake must overthrow their credit? Does it diminish it? Has it any thing to do with it?

Another error imputed to the first Christians, was the expected approach of the day of judgment. I would introduce this objection by what appears a somewhat similar example. Our Saviour, speaking to Peter of John, said, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' (John xxi. 22.) These words, we find, had been so misconstrued, that a report from thence 'went abroad that that disciple should not die.' Supposé this had come to us amongst the opinions of the early Christians, and that the circumstance, from which the mistake sprang, had been lost, would not this error have been an impeachment of the whole Christian system? Yet with how little justice such a conclusion would have been drawn, the information which we possess enables us to perceive.

Now the error by which the primitive Christians were led to believe the early approach of the day of judgment, is no less ancient, nor better founded, than the error respecting the duration of St. John's life.

But it may be said that if the possibility of such an error of judgment on the part of the apostles be admitted, how can we put the least trust in them? We answer, that, if the apostles testimony be true, we do not care for their want of judgment; the facts alone, if they be facts, give a complete security for every conclusion we want. But though such an answer might be sufficient, it is not the only one nor the best which can be given to the objection; and the following cautions, founded on fair distinctions, will exclude all dangerous uncertainty on this head.

1. We must separate the declared object of the mission from what is only incidental to it. To the latter belongs the question of being possessed by a devil; on which this is not the place to say any thing *pro* or *con*; and if it were, it would be arrogant in me to give an opinion. Thus much, may, however, be said, that

granting the opinions entertained anciently on such questions to be erroneous, and that the evangelists fell in with the fashion of the age, Christianity has nothing to fear from the concession. It was not a doctrine first promulgated by Christ; it is noticed only incidentally; and forms no part of the object of his revelation. At any rate, it is unconnected with testimony. The malady of the demoniacs was as real as the disorder of deafness, and as really cured; and it matters not whether we do in the latter, but do not in the former, know the nature of the complaint. The change arising from the working of a miracle was in both cases the same.

2. We must distinguish between the doctrines of the apostles and their arguments. The former came to them from revelation; the latter were merely the suggestions of their own thoughts. Thus the admission of the Gentiles, without undergoing circumcision, was revealed to the apostles, and the revelation was attested by miracles. Nevertheless, St. Paul, when treating of the subject, argues the question in his own way. The doctrine must be received, though the arguments may, if deemed inconclusive, be rejected; and the same observation applies to all similar instances.¹

CHAPTER III.

The Connexion of Christianity with the Jewish History.

Undoubtedly our Saviour assumes the divine origin of the Mosaic institution: and it is difficult to assign any other cause for the existence of that institution; especially for the Jews adhering to the unity, when every other people slid into polytheism; for their being behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, but superior in their notions of the Deity.² Undoubt-

¹ See Burnet's *Exposit.* art. 6.

² 'In the doctrine of the unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, and the goodness of God;

edly, also, our Saviour recognises the prophetic character of many of their ancient writers. So far, therefore, we are bound to go. But to make Christianity answerable with its life for the truth of each passage of the Old Testament, is to bring unnecessary difficulties into the whole system. These books were read and received by the Jews of our Saviour's time. He and his apostles, in common with all other Jews, alluded to and used them. Yet except where he expressly ascribes divine authority to particular predictions, we can draw no conclusion from the books being so used and applied, beside the proof of their reception at that time. In this view, our Scriptures afford a valuable testimony to those of the Jews. But the nature of this testimony ought to be understood. It neither is nor could be, as it is represented to be, a specific ratification of each fact and opinion. St. James (v. 11.) says, 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.' Notwithstanding this text, the reality of Job's history, and even the existence of such a person, has been always deemed a fair subject of discussion amongst Christian divines. St. James is good evidence of the existence of the book of Job at that time, and of its reception by the Jews; but of nothing more. St. Paul says, 'Now, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth.'¹ These names are not found in the Old Testament; yet no one imagines that St. Paul is here asserting the authority of the writing he quoted;

and in their opinions concerning the creation, preservation, and government of the world.'—Campbell on Mir. 207. To which we may add, that in their religion, there were neither cruelties or impurities, nor a fanciful connexion between certain appearances and actions, and the destiny of nations or individuals. On these conceits, rested the whole train of auguries, and of the incantations which were practised by the common people. From every thing of this sort the religion of the Jews alone was free.—See Priestley on the Jewish and Christian Revelation, 1794.

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 8.

much less, that he so involves himself with this question, that the credit of his own history should depend on the fact, whether Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, or not. Why then should a more rigorous interpretation be put on other references? I do not mean, that other passages of the Jewish history stand on no better evidence than the history of Job, or of Jannes and Jambres; but that a reference in the New Testament to a passage in the Old, does not so fix its authority, as to exclude all inquiry into the reasons on which that credibility rests.

Thus much it is necessary to state explicitly, because Voltaire, and his school, have often attacked Christianity through Judaism. Some objections of this class are founded in misconstruction, some in exaggeration; but all proceed on a supposition, not supported by argument; that the attestation, which the Author and first teachers of Christianity gave to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, extends to every portion of the Jewish history; and thus make Christianity responsible for the truth of every narrative in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER IV.

Rejection of Christianity.

We acknowledge that the Christian religion, though it converted many, did not produce a general conviction, even where it first appeared. This want of success is called the 'rejection' of the Christian history and miracles, and has been thought a strong objection to the facts of the history itself.

The objection is twofold; as it relates, 1. to the Jews, and, 2. to the Gentiles. The case of the Jews, to whom our Saviour's ministry was originally addressed, first offers itself.

Now, on the subject of the truth of the Christian religion, with us there is but one question, viz. whether the miracles were wrought? for if wrought, we

acknowledge the religion *in toto*. No doubt lies between the premises and the conclusion; and this order of reasoning is become so familiar, that we do not readily apprehend how it could ever have been otherwise. Yet a Jew of our Saviour's age, though he allowed the reality of the miracle, had much to do to persuade himself that Jesus was the Messiah. Now, the writers of the New Testament confess that the miracles did not so carry conviction even to those who saw them, as to leave no room for doubt. To this point the evangelists may be allowed to be good witnesses; because it is one in which exaggeration or disguise would have been rather the other way.

Thus we find in John vii. 21—31. a very remarkable passage, representing the reasoning of different persons on the working of a miracle. Some of them thought, indeed, there was something extraordinary in the miracle, but doubted whether Jesus was the Christ they expected; because, said they, 'we know this man, whence he cometh; but when Christ shall come, no man shall know whence he is.' Others, on the contrary, believed Jesus to be the expected Messiah; for, said they, 'when Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these?' The belief, then, which the miracles lead to, was not the result of instantaneous conviction, but of a calculation rather of contending probabilities.

Again, in the history of Lazarus's recovery from death, we read in John xi. 44. that though 'many of the Jews who saw the things which Jesus did, believed on him, others went and told the Pharisees what Jesus had done.' Now, we cannot suppose that the evangelist meant to say that some of the spectators doubted of the truth of the miracle: his meaning must be simply, that, though they saw it, yet they did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah, nor could they overcome their hostile feelings towards him; a sentiment more clearly expressed in the words of the following chapter,

‘ Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet believed they not on him.’

Lastly, St. John, c. ix. gives us the circumstantial account of the cure of a blind man ; where though the miracle was submitted to all the scrutiny which a sceptic could propose, and over which it effectually triumphed, still it failed to produce in the minds of the Jewish rulers a conviction favorable to Christ’s pretensions ; because, said they, ‘ we know that God spake unto Moses ; but as for this fellow, we know not whence he is.’ On the mind of the man himself, who was free from the prejudice of the priests, and felt the benefit of the cure, the miracle had its natural operation ; and to his fair inference, ‘ If this man were not of God he could do nothing,’ the Jewish rulers had no other reply to make, than what authority often makes to argument, ‘ Dost thou teach us ?’

Should it be asked, how the Jews came to be so prejudiced against the evidence of facts, we reply that, 1. they expected a Messiah of a totally different character ; and, 2. they believed that miracles could be worked by the devil as well as the Deity. Nor are these suppositions made to meet the occasion. They are recognised by the Jewish writings as well as ours. From the first of these causes the Jews were led not to receive Christ ; and from the second, to attribute his miracles, not to God, but Beelzebub. Nor had Jesus any way of destroying the latter prejudice, except by showing that his mission was so adverse to the powers of darkness, that it was not reasonable to suppose that they would aid in advancing the cause of their enemy ; and even this argument would scarcely avail with persons, in whose minds the power of the devil was as unlimited as that of God. We of the present day may think such opinions too absurd to be ever entertained seriously : but they were as reasonable as the once prevalent belief in witchcraft ; and they who know any thing of human nature

will readily acknowledge that such prejudices present a barrier too strong for even reason to break down, and which miracles themselves would rather tend to confirm, when viewed under the light of magical operations.

This knowledge of the then state of opinions enables us to explain, what has been a subject of wonder to some, why the Jews should reject the miracles of Christ done before their eyes, and yet admit those, which their history told them was done in the olden time by Moses and the prophets? The fact is, that the doctrine of the agency of devils was not then in existence. Besides, the authority of Moses and the prophets being established, and having become the foundation of the national polity and religion, it was not probable that the latter Jews, brought up in a reverence for that religion, and the subjects of that polity, should apply to their history a reasoning which tended to overthrow the foundation of both.

II. The infidelity of the Gentiles, especially of men of rank and learning, will account for the rejection of Christianity by persons, whose contempt for all religions no evidence of facts or reasoning could overcome. They who lived in the midst of 600¹ different forms of superstitions, were little likely to inquire into the merits of Christianity, which they, doubtless, reckoned merely another form of fables and folly. Besides, as it mixed with neither philosophy nor politics, nor came recommended by the charms of composition, that must have appeared to them a strange system, in which there was no field for discussion, or such only as they could not understand, much less hope to enter on. The birth, nature, and ministry of

¹ Such was the number at Rome alone, says Dionysius of Halicarnassus, quoted by Jortin (*Remarks on Ecclesiast. Hist.* i. p. 371.); [but neither Jortin nor Paley seem to have been aware that 600 is, in Latin, the definite number for an indefinite one. *Ed.*]

Christ were all alien from their theological notions. The Redeemer and future Judge of man to be himself a mortal, crucified between two thieves, was a strange story; and still more strange the Christian doctrine of grace, redemption, and justification; of the blood of Christ shed for the sins of men; of reconciliation, and of mediation; points of which they had heard little and thought less.

Besides, Christianity was presented to the heathens under the peculiar disadvantage of its connexion with Judaism, and thus shared in the ridicule with which the Jews and their religion were treated by the Greeks and Romans, who regarded Jehovah as the tutelar deity of a people, deemed to be the very pass-word for credulity. When, therefore, Christianity was first heard of, it was thought to be merely a quarrel amongst the Jews about some articles of their faith, undeserving of attention to those, who knew little and cared less of the Mosaic and Christian creeds. Indeed, so ignorant or indifferent to the history of the Jews were the people of Rome, that even Tacitus (*Hist. v. 2.*) states they worshipped the effigy of an ass; a charge which is confidently repeated by Plutarch in *Sympos. iv. 5.* To these considerations, operating equally on men who did and who did not think; on the writers who direct the taste, and the rakes who lead the fashion of their age, must be added the effect of a general feeling in favor of the established religion; and the still stronger prejudice, on the part of the higher ranks, to adopt any opinions which originate with the lower orders, as was the case of Christianity. Yet the new faith made its way; and its success, in despite of such difficulties, is only the more to be wondered at.

This rejection of Christianity by the heathens, on the ground of their contempt of it, accounts also for their silence respecting it. Had they rejected it after examination, they would have probably given their reasons in writing; but on subjects for which men have a

contempt, they seldom trouble themselves to perpetuate their thoughts by writings. Of this contemptuous silence, the letters of Pliny the younger furnish an example, and let us, in some measure, into the cause. Out of 240 letters of his, still in existence, Christianity is noticed only twice in his celebrated correspondence with Trajan; and from these letters it appears, that his attention was directed to the question of the religion, only as it was indirectly connected with the subject of politics; for as to the doctrines or the grounds of the creed, his indifference and ignorance were alike. Had those two letters been lost, with what confidence would the obscurity of the Christian religion have been argued from Pliny's silence, and with how little truth?

Another instance of how little was known of and cared about Christianity by heathen writers, may be seen in the case of Tacitus, who describes Christianity as 'a pernicious superstition' (*exitiabilis superstitio*); a description which no unbeliever of the present age would not say was unmerited; and to disprove which, it is only necessary to read the instructions given by St. Paul to the very Roman converts of whom Tacitus speaks, and but a few years before the time of which he is speaking; directions too, not forming a collection of fine sayings brought together from different parts of a large work, but standing entire, without the intermixture of a single exceptionable thought; 'Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.' 'Bless them which persecute you,' &c.—Romans xii. 9. xiii. 13.

But even if we may not, in contending with heathen authorities, produce our books against theirs, we may at least confront theirs with one another. Now of this 'superstition' called 'pernicious' by Tacitus, what has Pliny to say? Simply that, after examination, he could find nothing to speak of, much less to blame, except that, in conjunction with certain

religious duties, perfectly harmless, the Christians mixed up a federal oath, not to commit any wickedness, and to keep their hands from stealing, their tongue from lying, and to be just in all their dealings.

From the language of Tacitus then, we may fairly infer—

1. That the learned of his time saw Christianity ‘as through a glass darkly;’ for had Tacitus known more of its precepts, constitution, and design, he would have respected the principles, however he discredited the story, and have described the religion he rejected in a different manner; nor have yielded to the feeling of contempt, with which he viewed the worship of a person unknown to even the polytheism of his country.

2. That little reliance can be placed on minds the most acute respecting subjects they despise, and which they therefore will not inquire into. Had not Christianity lived to tell its own tale, it would have gone down to posterity, on the authority of a grave and acute historian, as a ‘pernicious superstition.’

3. That to despise a question without previous examination is a failing, from which men of the greatest minds are not always free; and that the indulgence of it leads them to adopt erroneous ideas, by their not condescending to separate things in their nature really different, though apparently similar, and involving both in one common charge of absurdity.

4. That we need not be surprised at the silence of writers of that age on the subject of Christianity, when even those who mention it, appear to have misconceived its character, and to have regarded it with contempt.

Besides, the greatest part of the learned heathens could know the facts of the Christian story only from report, as they probably never looked into the books themselves. Now, as their settled habit was to reject all reports of this kind, the truth, which depended on

inquiry, had no chance; and if they would not inquire, how could they be convinced? Still, the truth is not the less, though they made no search after it.

Further, it appears that the heathens of education were divided into those who despised Christianity and those who were converts to it; and both would be silent on the subject from two different motives; the former from contempt, and the latter from having their attention drawn off to the more important duties of their new calling; and their testimony, had they then spoken, would have ceased to be the testimony of Pagans. Nor ought we to forget that the heathens attributed to magical, as the Jews did to demon agency, the working of miracles. Hence, Justin Martyr alleges this as his reason for arguing from prophecy rather than miracles; and, in like manner, Origen imputes this evasion to Celsus, Jerom to Porphyry, and Lactantius to heathens in general.

CHAPTER V.

That the Christian Miracles are not recited, or appealed to, by early Christian writers themselves, so fully or frequently as might have been expected.

I shall consider this objection, 1. as it applies to the letters of the apostles, preserved in the New Testament; and, 2. as it applies to the remaining writings of other early Christians.

The epistles of the apostles are either hortatory or argumentative. So far as they were occupied in delivering admonitions against vice or prevailing corruptions, or in fortifying the constancy of the disciples under their trials, there appears to be no place for more of these references than we actually find.

So far as the epistles are argumentative, the nature of the argument accounts for the infrequency of these

allusions. These epistles were not written to prove the truth of Christianity. The subject under consideration was not that, which the miracles decided, the reality of our Lord's mission; but that, which the miracles did not decide, viz. the nature of his person or power, the design of his advent, its effects, and of those effects the value, kind, and extent. Still miraculous evidence lies at the bottom of the argument: for nothing could be so preposterous as for the disciples of Jesus to dispute concerning his office or character, unless they believed that he had shown, by supernatural proofs, that there was something extraordinary in both. Miraculous evidence, therefore, forming not the texture of these arguments, but the ground and substratum, if it be only occasionally discerned, it is as much as ought to take place, supposing the history to be true.

Besides, it should be borne in mind, that in this infrequency of allusion to the miracles, the apostolic epistles resemble the apostolic speeches; which last are given by a writer, who distinctly records numerous miracles wrought by these apostles themselves, and by the Founder of the institution in their presence. It is, therefore, unwarrantable to contend, that the omission or infrequency of such recitals in the speeches of the apostles negatives the existence of the miracles, when the speeches are given in immediate conjunction with the history of those miracles.

To prove this similitude, it may be remarked, that, though in St. Luke's Gospel, the apostle Peter is said to have been present at many miracles wrought by Christ; and though the second part of the same history¹ ascribes other decisive miracles to Peter himself, yet out of six speeches of Peter, preserved in the Acts, only two make any mention of miracles done by Christ, and but once are his own miraculous powers

¹ See Acts iii. 1. v. 1. ix. 34. 40.

alluded to. In his speech on the day of Pentecost,¹ on the conversion of Cornelius,² on the election of Matthias,³ on the cure of the lame man,⁴ in his speech before the Sanhedrim,⁵ and in his second apology in the presence of that assembly, no mention is made of any but Christ's miracles, although some of those done by himself preceded the time of his speaking. In like manner, Stephen's long speech contains no reference whatever to miracles, though it is expressly related of him, almost immediately before the speech, that he did miracles among the people.⁶ Again, though miracles are expressly attributed to St. Paul on various occasions, at all of which the historian himself was present; yet in the speeches delivered by St. Paul, the appeal to his own miracles, and even to those of Christ, is only rare and incidental; while in the letters, though the references to the all important miracle of Christ's resurrection are frequent, and scarcely less so to the almost equally important one of his own conversion, in other cases the allusions are fewer and less direct. Thus the consent between St. Paul's speeches and letters is sufficiently exact; and the reason is in both the same, viz. that the miraculous history was presupposed, and that the only questions were, whether, allowing the miracles to be true, Jesus was the true Messiah; and if so, what was the object of his mission.

The preceding observation, that the subject of which the apostolic writings treated, did not lead them to any direct recital of the Christian history, applies also to the writings of the apostolic fathers. The epistle of Barnabas is in its subject and general composition like the epistle to the Hebrews; and contains an allegorical application of divers passages of the Jewish history, law, and ritual, to various parts of the

¹ Acts ii. 23.² Acts x. 39.³ Acts i. 15.⁴ Acts iii. 12.⁵ Acts iv. 8.⁶ Acts vi. 8.

Christian dispensation. The epistle of Clement was written for the sole purpose of quieting dissensions amongst the members of the church of Corinth, and of reviving in their minds the temper of which their predecessors had left them an example. The vision of Hermas quotes neither the Old Testament nor the New; and merely falls into the mode of speech, which the author had read in our Gospels. The epistles of Polycarp and Ignatius had for their principal object the order and discipline of the churches which they addressed. Yet, under all these circumstances of disadvantage, the great points of the Christian history are fully recognised.

There is, however, another class of writers, of whom it cannot be said, that the subjects of which they treated did not require frequent references to the Christian history: I mean, the ancient apologists, whose declared design was to defend Christianity, and to give reasons for their adherence to it.

Of these apologists, the most ancient is Quadratus, who lived about 70 years after the ascension, and presented his apology to the emperor Adrian. In a passage of his work, preserved by Eusebius,¹ there is an appeal to the miracles of Christ, in terms as express and satisfactory as we could desire. Justin Martyr,² after mentioning in express terms the miracles of Christ, says, 'that some, who saw the things done, asserted that it was a magical appearance, and dared to call Jesus a magician, and a deceiver of the people;' and it is to guard against the repetition of the assertion in his own time, that Justin, on another occasion,³ has recourse to the arguments from prophecy, rather than to those to be drawn from the miracles. In like manner, Irenæus (ii. 57.) notices the same evasion in the adversaries of Christianity, and replies to it by the same argument; and so does Lactantius (v. 3.).

¹ Hist. Eccles. iv. 3.

² Dialog. p. 258. ed. Thirlb.

³ Apolog. i. p. 48.

But to return to the Christian apologists, Tertulian (p. 20. ed. Par. 1675.) refers expressly to the miracles, and says, that though the Jews considered Jesus to be merely a magician, his miracles proved him to be the Word of God.

Nor is the language of Origen less explicit on the subject of Christ's miracles; while the comments he makes on them show at once his accuracy and candor; 'for,' says he, 'if the miracle of Christ restoring persons to life be a fiction, more would have been restored, even of those who had been long in their graves; whereas only a few instances have been recorded, such as the recovery of Jairus's daughter, that of the widow's son, and of Lazarus.'

In another passage he touches on the old solution of magic, which Celsus had applied to the miracles of Christ; to which also Porphyry, the most able of the heathen writers against Christianity, resorted, as we learn from Jerom.

But though we now perceive such comparison of the miracles of Christ with the tricks of jugglers, to have been a mere subterfuge, and answered then by an appeal to prophecy only, because the same solutions did not apply to prophecy equally well; still it appears that the miracles were understood then, as now, in their literal sense, and appealed to as real events, by the apologists for Christianity; a fact which answers sufficiently the present objection, founded on the infrequency of the appeal made to them by early Christian writers. It must, however, be admitted, that the ancient Christian advocates did not insist on the miracles, as an argument, so strongly as would now be done. But is it certain that they thought the miracles to be decisive of the controversy? At any rate, since the infrequency of their appeal to the miracles is proved to be owing to neither their ignorance nor doubt of the fact, the objection lies, not against the truth of the history, but the judgment of its defenders.

CHAPTER VI.

Want of Universality in the Knowledge and Reception of Christianity, and of greater Clearness in the Evidence.

Of a revelation, which really came from God, the proof, it has been said, would in all ages be so manifest, that no part of the human species would remain ignorant of it, no understanding fail of being convinced by it.

The advocates of Christianity do not pretend that the evidence of their religion possesses these qualities. They do not deny that divine power might have communicated to the world a higher degree of assurance, and have given to his communication a stronger and more extensive influence. Doubtless, God could have so formed men, as to have perceived the truths of religion intuitively. He could have presented a separate miracle to each man's senses, have established a standing miracle, and have caused miracles to be wrought in every different age and country.

The question, therefore, is, not whether Christianity possesses the highest possible degree of evidence, but whether the want of more be a sufficient reason for rejecting that which we have.

Now, when a question is made whether a dispensation could come from God or not, there can be no fairer method of judging concerning such dispensation, than by comparing it with other acts, acknowledged to be produced by the same agency; and if the dispensation in question labor under no defects but what belong to other dispensations, these defects do not justify us in setting aside the proofs offered for its authenticity.

Throughout the order, then, of nature, of which God is the author, what we find is a system of beneficence, not a system of optimism. I mean, that there are few cases where we cannot suppose some-

thing more perfect than what we see. The rain is confessedly amongst the contrivances of the Creator, for the sustentation of animals and vegetables; yet how partially and irregularly is it supplied! how much of it falls on the sea, where it seems to be of no use! how often is it wanted where it would be of the greatest, while tracts of continent are rendered deserts by the scarcity of it! We could imagine the matter to be otherwise regulated: showers to fall just where and when they would do good; always seasonable, every where sufficient; so distributed as not to leave a field scorched by drought, or even a plant withering for lack of moisture. Yet, does the difference between the real and the imagined case, or the seeming inferiority of one to the other, authorise us to say, that the present disposition of the atmosphere is not amongst the productions or designs of the Deity? Does it check the inference, drawn from the confessed beneficence of the provision? or does it make us cease to admire the contrivance? The observation, exemplified in this single instance, may be repeated concerning most of the phenomena of nature; and the true conclusion is this: that to inquire what the Deity might have done, could have done, or even ought to have done, and to build any propositions on such inquiries against evidence of facts, is wholly unwarrantable. It is a mode of reasoning which will do neither in natural history nor natural religion, and which cannot, therefore, be applied with safety to revelation. It may have some foundation, in speculative *a priori* ideas of the divine attributes; but it has none in experience or in analogy. The general character of the works of nature is, on the one hand, goodness in design and effect; and, on the other, a liability to objections, if such be allowed, by reason of seeming incompleteness or uncertainty in attaining their end. Christianity participates of this character. The true similitude between nature and revelation

consists in this; that they each bear strong marks of their original; that they each also bear appearances of irregularity and defect. A system of strict optimism may nevertheless be the real system in both cases; but the proof is hidden from us. We ought not, then, to expect to perceive that in revelation, which we hardly perceive in any thing else: the beneficence, of which we can judge, ought to satisfy us; the optimism, of which we cannot judge, ought not to be sought after. We can judge of beneficence, because it depends on effects which we experience; we cannot judge of optimism, because it implies a comparison of consequences which we see, with others which we only imagine.

If Christianity be compared with the state and progress of natural religion, the argument of the objector will gain nothing by the comparison. An unbeliever once said, that, if God had given a revelation, he would have written it in the skies. Are the truths of natural religion written in the skies, or in a language which every one reads? Is this the case with even the most necessary sciences of human life? An Otahaitan or Esquimaux knows nothing of Christianity; does he know more of the principles of deism or morality? which, notwithstanding his ignorance, are neither untrue, nor unimportant, nor uncertain. The existence of the Deity is left to be collected from observations, which every man does not make, perhaps, is not capable of making. Can it be argued, that God does not exist, because, if he did, he would discover himself by proofs, which no inadvertency could miss, no prejudice withstand?

If Christianity be regarded as a providential instrument for the melioration of mankind, its progress and diffusion resemble that of other causes by which human life is improved. The Deity hath not touched the order of nature in vain. The Jewish religion produced great and permanent effects; the Christian

religion hath done the same. It has disposed the world to amendment; it has put things in a train. It is by no means improbable, that it may become universal.

When we argue that Christianity must necessarily be true because it is beneficial, we go, perhaps, too far on one side: and we certainly go too far on the other, when we conclude that it must be false, because it is not so efficacious as we could have supposed. The question of its truth is to be tried on its proper evidence. 'The evidence,' as Bishop Butler observes, 'depends on the judgment we form of human conduct, under circumstances of which we know something; the objection stands on the supposed conduct of the Deity, under relations of which we know nothing.'

What would be the real effect of that overpowering evidence, which our adversaries require in a revelation, it is difficult to foretell; at least, we must speak of it as of a dispensation of which we have no experience. Some consequences, however, would attend this economy, unfitted to a revelation from God.

I. Irresistible proof would restrain the voluntary powers too much; would not answer the purpose of trial and probation; would give birth to no inquiry: there would be no submission of passion to moral evidence and probable truth, and no desire so to learn and to obey the will of God, as to resign present pleasure to the reasonable expectation of propitiating his favor.

II. These modes of communication would leave no place for the admission of internal evidence: I mean, that the certainty of the revelation would diminish those moral effects produced on the conduct and feelings of Christians, which the Scriptures give rise to; and would thus interfere with one of the probable designs of the dispensation, by producing an obedience to the divine will as compulsory on the mind, as the laws of nature are on inanimate matter, instead of operating on moral agents by the influence of motives,

which it depends on the parties themselves to receive or not at will. 'It is not meet,' says Baxter, 'to govern rational free agents by sight and sense. It would be no trial or thanks to the most sensual wretch to forbear sinning, if heaven and hell were open to his sight. That spiritual vision and fruition is our state.'¹ There may be truth in this thought, though roughly expressed. Few things are more improbable, than that the human species should be the highest order of beings in the universe; that animated nature should ascend from the lowest reptile to us, and all at once stop there. If there be classes above us of rational intelligence, clearer manifestations may belong to them. This may be one of the distinctions. And it may be one, to which we ourselves hereafter shall attain.

III. The perfect display of a future state of existence would be almost incompatible with the course of human affairs; for the impression of such a state might so fill the thoughts, as to leave no place for the care of worldly prosperity, or even of subsistence, and thus destroy all stimulus to the industry of man. When, therefore, we read of the early Christians selling all their goods, possessing all things in common, and continuing daily in the temple, we meet with conduct only such as might be expected from persons on whom the evidence of miracles struck with their full force. But had such conduct been universal, the business of the world must have been neglected; the arts of life forgotten; and, while the plough and loom stood still, all the buz and bustle of industry would have given place to the silent contemplations of the religionist and the lonely seclusion of the hermit; and it was to correct the tendency of this feeling, that St. Paul found it necessary to recall his converts to the duties of domestic life, and even to set an ex-

¹ Reasons, p. 357.

ample of his contented application to worldly pursuits.

But by the manner in which religion is now proposed, almost all are enabled, and many induced, to seek their salvation through the medium of Christianity, without interruption to the regular course of human affairs.

CHAPTER VII.

The supposed Effects of Christianity.

That a religion, which holds forth the final reward of virtue and punishment of vice, and proposes those distinctions of virtue and vice, which the wisest of mankind confess to be just, should not be believed, is very possible; but that, so far as it is believed, it should produce a bad effect on public happiness, is a proposition which requires very strong evidence to render it credible. Yet many have contended for this paradox, and confident appeals have been made to history and observation, for the truth of it.

In the conclusions, however, said to be drawn from experience, two sources of mistake may be perceived.

1. That the influence of religion is looked for in the wrong place.

2. That Christianity is charged with consequences, for which it is not responsible.

1. The influence of religion is not to be sought for in the councils of princes, in the resolutions of popular assemblies; in the conduct of governments towards the subject, or of states towards one another; or in the more personal topics of party intrigue, which fill the page of history; but must be perceived, if at all, in the silent course of private life; and even there its influence may not be very obvious. If it check individual dissoluteness, if it beget a general probity in the transaction of business, if it humanise the many and excite benevolence in the few, it has all the effect

which can offer itself to external notice. The kingdom of heaven is within us. That which is the substance of the religion, its hopes and consolations, its intermixture with the thoughts, the devotion of the heart, the control of appetite, the steady direction of the will to the commands of God, is necessarily invisible. Yet on these depend the virtue and happiness of millions. This cause renders the representations of history, with respect to religion, more defective and fallacious than on any other subject. Religion operates most on those of whom history knows the least : on the heads of families, on domestics, on the orderly tradesman, the quiet villager, the manufacturer at his loom, the husbandman in his fields. Amongst such, its influence collectively may be of inestimable value, yet its effects little on those who figure on the stage of the world. They may know nothing of it ; they may believe nothing of it ; they may be actuated by motives more impetuous than those which religion is able to excite. It cannot, therefore, be thought strange, that this influence should elude the grasp of public history : for, what is public history, but a register of the successes and disappointments, the vices, the follies, and the quarrels, of those who engage in contentions for power ?

The Christian religion also acts indirectly on public usages. Christianity is not a code of civil law. Hence it can reach public institutions only through private character. Now, though its influence here be considerable, yet many public usages may remain repugnant to its principles. To get rid of these, the leading part of the community must act, and act together. But it may be long before the persons who compose this body be sufficiently touched with the Christian character, to join in the suppression of usages, to which they have been reconciled by habit and interest. Still the effects of Christianity, even in this view, have been important. It has mitigated

the conduct of war, and the treatment of captives. It has softened the administration of despotic governments. It has abolished polygamy, and restrained the licentiousness of divorces; put an end to the exposure of children, and the immolation of slaves. It has suppressed the combats of gladiators,¹ and the impurities of religious rites; and banished, if not unnatural vices, at least the toleration of them. It has greatly meliorated the condition of the great mass of society, the laboring classes, by procuring for them a day of weekly rest. In all countries, where it is professed, it has produced numerous establishments for the relief of sickness and poverty; and, in some, a regular provision by law. It has triumphed over the slavery established in the Roman empire: it is contending, and, I trust, will one day prevail, against the worse slavery of the West Indies.

A Christian writer,² so early as in the second century, has testified the resistance which Christianity made to wicked and licentious practices though established by law and usage:—‘Neither in Parthia, do the Christians, though Parthians, use polygamy; nor in Persia, though Persians, do they marry their own daughters; nor among the Bactri, or Galli, do they violate the sanctity of marriage; nor, wherever they are, do they suffer themselves to be overcome by ill-constituted laws and manners.’

Socrates did not destroy the idolatry of Athens, or produce the slightest revolution in the manners of his country.

But to recur to the argument, that the benefit of religion is felt chiefly in private life. From the first

¹ Lipsius affirms (Sat. b. i. c. 12.), that the gladiatorial shows sometimes cost Europe twenty or thirty thousand lives in a month; and that not only the men, but even the women of all ranks, were passionately fond of these shows. See Bishop Porteus, Sermon XIII.

² Bardesanes, ap. Euseb. Præp. Evang. vi. 10.

reception of Christianity to the present day, there have been in every age many made better by it, not only in their conduct, but in their disposition; and happier, not so much in their external circumstances, as in that which alone deserves the name of happiness, the tranquillity and consolation of their thoughts.

Christianity has also obtained a sensible, although not a complete influence, on the public judgment of morals. And this is very important. For without the occasional correction, which public opinion receives, by referring to some fixed standard of morality, no man can foretell into what extravagances it might wander; assassination might become as honorable as duelling, and unnatural crimes be accounted as venial as fornication is wont to be accounted. In this way it is possible, that many may be kept in order by Christianity, who are not themselves Christians, and be guided by the rectitude which it communicates to public opinion. 'Certain it is, that the lowest of the people have truer and worthier notions of God, his attributes and perfections, a deeper sense of the difference of good and evil, a greater regard to moral obligations and to the duties of life, and a more firm expectation of a future state of rewards and punishments, than any considerable number of men were, in any heathen country, found to have had.'¹

After all, the value of Christianity is not to be appreciated by its temporal effects. The object of revelation is to influence human conduct in this life; but what is gained to happiness by that influence, can only be estimated by taking in the whole of human existence. Besides, there may be great consequences of Christianity, which do not belong to it as a revelation. The effects on human salvation may be universal, though the religion be not universally known.

II. Christianity is charged with many consequences

¹ Clarke, *Ev. Nat. Rel.* p. 206, ed. v.

for which it is not responsible. Religious motives have had no more to do in the formation of nine-tenths of the persecuting laws, which in different countries have been established on the subject of religion, than they have had to do in England with the making of the game-laws. These measures, although they have the Christian religion for their subject, are resolvable into a principle, which Christianity certainly did not plant; viz. that they who are in possession of power must do what they can to keep it. Christianity is answerable for no part of the mischief which has been brought on the world by persecution, except that which has arisen from conscientious persecutors. Now these have never been either numerous or powerful. Nor is it to Christianity that even their mistake can be fairly imputed. They have been misled by an error in their moral philosophy; and pursued the particular, without adverting to the general consequence. Believing certain articles of faith, or mode of worship, to be essential to salvation, they thought themselves bound to bring all they could, by every means, into them, without considering what would be the effect of such conduct, if adopted as a general rule. Had there been in the New Testament, what there are in the Koran, precepts authorising coercion in the propagation of the religion, and the use of violence towards unbelievers, the case would have been different. This distinction could not have been taken, nor this defence made.

I apologise for no kind of persecution; but I think that even the fact has been exaggerated. The slave-trade destroys more in a year, than the inquisition does in a hundred, or perhaps has done since its foundation.

If it be objected that Christianity is chargeable with every mischief, of which it has been the occasion, though not the motive; I answer, that, if the malevolent passions be there, the world will never

want occasions. The noxious element will always find a conductor ; and any point will produce an explosion. Did the applauded intercommunity of the Pagan theology preserve the peace of the Roman world ? Did it prevent oppressions or proscriptions ? Was it bigotry that carried Alexander into the East, or Cæsar into Gaul ? Are the nations of the world, into which Christianity has not found its way, or from which it has been banished, free from contentions ? Are their contentions less sanguinary ? Is it owing to Christianity, or to the want of it, that the finest regions of the East, and a great-part of the Mediterranean coast, are at this day a desert ? or that the banks of the Nile, whose fertility is not to be impaired by neglect, or destroyed by the ravages of war, serve only for the scene of a ferocious anarchy, or the supply of unceasing hostilities ? Europe itself has known no religious wars for some centuries, yet has hardly ever been without war. Are the calamities, which at this day afflict it, to be imputed to Christianity ? Has Poland fallen by a Christian crusade ? Has the overthrow in France of civil order been effected by the votaries of our religion, or by its foes ? Amongst the awful lessons which the crimes and miseries of that country afford to mankind, this is one ; that, to be a persecutor, it is not necessary to be a bigot ; that in rage and cruelty, in mischief and destruction, fanaticism itself can be outdone by infidelity.

Finally, If war, as it is now carried on between nations, produces less misery and ruin than formerly, we are indebted perhaps to Christianity for the change ; and in this point of view it appears to have been of advantage to the world.

The differences of opinion amongst Christians fall within the alternative here stated. If we possess the disposition, which Christianity labors above all other qualities to inculcate, these differences will do little

harm: if that disposition be wanting, other causes will continually rise up to call malevolent passions into action. Differences of opinion, when accompanied with mutual charity, are generally innocent, and sometimes useful. They promote inquiry, discussion, and knowledge; and help to keep up an attention to religion, which might die away in the calm of universal agreement.

CHAPTER VIII.

Conclusion.

In religion, as in every other subject of human reasoning, much depends on the order in which we dispose our inquiries. A man who takes up a system of divinity with a previous opinion, that every part must be true, or the whole false, approaches the discussion with great disadvantage. No other system, which is founded on moral evidence, would bear to be treated in the same manner. Still to a certain degree, we are all introduced to our religious studies under this prejudication, which cannot be avoided. The weakness of the judgment in youth, and its extreme susceptibility of impression render it necessary to furnish it with some principles or other. That indifference, suspense, and equilibrium of the judgment, which some require in religious matters, and wish to keep up in the conduct of education, are impossible to be preserved in the present condition of human life.

Hence the doctrines of religion come to us before the proofs, and with that mixture of explanations, from which no public creed is, or can be, free; and thus it happens, that when articles, which appear as parts of Christianity, contradict the apprehension of the persons to whom it is proposed, rash and confident tempers hastily and indiscriminately reject the whole. But is this to do justice, either to themselves, or to the religion? The rational way of treating any subject

of importance is to attend to the truth of its principles alone. When we once feel a ground of credibility, we can proceed with safety to inquire into the interpretation of records, and into the doctrines which have been deduced from them. Nor will it either endanger our faith, or diminish or alter our motives for obedience, if we discover that these conclusions are formed with different degrees of probability, and possess different degrees of importance.

This conduct of the understanding, dictated by every rule of right reasoning, will uphold personal Christianity even in countries where it is established under forms the most liable to objection. It will further guard us against prejudices to the disadvantage of religion, engendered by the controversies carried on amongst its professors; and it will induce a spirit of moderation in our judgment of, and conduct to, those who in such controversies are opposed to ourselves. What is clear in Christianity we shall find to be sufficient and infinitely valuable; what is dubious, unnecessary to be decided, or of secondary importance; and what is obscure will teach us to bear with the opinions others may have formed on the same subject.¹

A judgment, moreover, which is well satisfied of the general truth of the religion, will not only thus discriminate in its doctrines, but possess strength to overcome the reluctance of the imagination to admit articles of faith, attended with difficulty of apprehension, if such articles of faith be truly parts of the revelation. It was to be expected beforehand, that what related to the economy of the invisible world, with which revelation professes to do, and has to do,

¹ To those, who the most widely dissent from us, we shall say what Augustin said to the worst heretics of his age: '*Illi in vos æviant, qui nesciunt quo labore verum inveniatur, et quam difficile caveantur errores;—qui nesciunt, quanta difficultate sanetur oculus interioris hominis;—qui nesciunt, quibus suspiriis et gemitibus fiat ut ex quantalacunque parte possit intelligi Deus.*'

if true, should actually contain points remote from the comprehension of a mind acquiring all its ideas from sense alone.

It has been my care, in the preceding work, to preserve the separation between evidences and doctrines as inviolable as I could; to remove from the question all considerations which have been unnecessarily joined with it; and to offer a defence to Christianity, which every Christian might read, without seeing his own tenets attacked or decried; and it always afforded a satisfaction to my mind to observe that this was practicable; that few or none of our many controversies with one another affect the proofs of our religion; that the rent never descends to the foundation.

The truth of Christianity depends on its leading facts alone. Now of these we have evidence which ought to satisfy us, until it appear that mankind have ever been deceived by evidence as strong. We have some uncontested and incontestable points, to which the history of the human species has nothing similar to offer. A Jewish peasant changed the religion of the world, without a single circumstance to attract or influence success. Such a thing has not happened in any other instance. The companions of this Person, after his death, asserted his supernatural character, founded on his supernatural acts; and in consequence of their own belief of the truth of their assertions, and to communicate the knowledge of it to others, voluntarily entered on lives of toil and hardship, and, with a full experience of their danger, committed themselves to the last extremities of persecution. This has not a parallel. More particularly, a very few days after this Person had been publicly executed, and in the very city in which he was buried, these, his companions, declared with one voice that his body was restored to life; that they had seen him, handled him, ate with him, conversed with him; and

persuaded of the truth of what they told, preached his religion, with this strange fact as the foundation of it, in the face of those who had killed him, who were armed with the power of the country, and naturally disposed to treat his followers as they had treated himself; and having done this on the spot, where the event took place, carried the intelligence abroad, in despite of difficulties and opposition, and where the nature of their errand gave them nothing to expect but derision, insult, and outrage. This is without example. These three facts are certain, and would have been nearly so, if the Gospels had never been written. The Christian story, as to these points, has never varied; and no other has been set up. Every letter, discourse, controversy, amongst the followers of the religion; every book written by them, from the age of its commencement to the present time, in every part of the world in which it has been professed, and with every sect into which it has been divided, concur in representing these facts in this manner. A religion, which now possesses the greatest part of the civilised world, unquestionably sprang up at Jerusalem at this time. Some account must be given of its origin; some cause assigned for its rise. All the accounts of this origin, all the explications of this cause, whether taken from the writings of the early followers of the religion (in which alone it could be expected that they should be distinctly unfolded), or from occasional notices in other writings of that or the adjoining age, either expressly alleged the facts above stated, as the means by which the religion was set up, or adverted to its commencement in a manner which agrees with the supposition of these facts being true, and which testifies their operation and effects.

These propositions alone lay a foundation for our faith; for they prove the existence of a transaction, which cannot, even in its most general parts, be accounted for, on any reasonable supposition, except

that of the truth of the mission. But the particulars, the detail of the miracles or miraculous pretences, on which this unexampled transaction rested, and for which these men acted and suffered, it is undoubtedly of great importance to know. We have this detail from the fountain-head, from the persons themselves; in accounts written by eye-witnesses of the scene, by contemporaries and companions of those who were so; not in one book, but four, each containing enough for the verification of the religion, and all agreeing in the fundamental parts of the history. We have the authenticity of these books established by stronger proofs than belong to almost any other ancient book, and by proofs which widely distinguish them from any others claiming a similar authority. If there were any good reason, which there is not, for doubt concerning the names to which these books are ascribed, their antiquity, their reputation and authority amongst the early disciples, form a valid proof that they must, in the main at least, have agreed with what the first teachers of the religion delivered.

When we open these ancient volumes, we discover in them marks of truth, whether we consider each in itself, or collate them with one another. The writers certainly knew something of what they were writing about, for they manifest an acquaintance with local circumstances, with the history and usages of the times, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, living in that age. In every narrative we perceive simplicity and undesignedness; the air and language of reality. When we compare the different narratives, we find them so varying, as to repel all suspicion of confederacy; so agreeing, as to show that the accounts had one real transaction for their common foundation; often attributing different actions and discourses to the person whose history they profess to relate, yet so similar, as very much to bespeak the same character; a coincidence, that, in writers

such as they were, could only be the consequence of their writing from fact, and not from imagination.

These four narratives are confined to the history of the Founder of the religion, and end with his ministry. Since, however, it is certain that the affair went on, we cannot help being anxious to know how it proceeded. This intelligence has come down to us in a work, purporting to be written by a person connected with the business during the first stages of its progress, taking up the story where the former histories had left it, carrying on the narrative, oftentimes with great particularity, and throughout with the appearance of good sense,¹ information, and candor; stating all along the only probable origin of effects, which unquestionably were produced, together with the natural consequences of situations which unquestionably did exist; and confirmed, in the substance of the account, by the strongest possible accession of testimony which a history can receive, original letters, written by the principal subject of the history, on the business to which the history relates, and during, or soon after, the period which the history comprises. No man can say that this all together is not a body of strong historical evidence.

When we reflect that some of those from whom the books proceeded, are related to have themselves wrought miracles, to have been the subject of miracles, or of supernatural assistance in propagating the religion, we may perhaps be led to think, that more credit is due to these accounts, than what can be claimed by merely human testimony. But this is an argument which cannot be addressed to sceptics or unbelievers. A man must be a Christian before he

¹ See Peter's speech on curing the cripple (Acts iii. 18.), the council of the apostles (xv.), Paul's discourse at Athens (xvii. 22.), before Agrippa (xxvi.). I notice these passages, both as fraught with good sense, and as free from the smallest tincture of enthusiasm.

can receive it. The inspiration of the historical Scriptures, the nature, degree, and extent of that inspiration, are questions undoubtedly of serious discussion; but they are questions amongst Christians themselves, and not between them and others. The doctrine itself is by no means necessary to the belief of Christianity, which must, in the first instance at least, depend on the ordinary maxims of historical credibility.¹

In viewing the detail of miracles recorded in these books, we find every supposition negatived, by which they can be resolved into fraud or delusion. They were not secret, momentary, tentative, nor ambiguous; nor performed under the sanction of authority, with the spectators on their side, or in affirmation of tenets and practices already established. We find also the evidence alleged for them, which was by great numbers received, different from that on which other miraculous accounts rest. It was contemporary; it was published on the spot; it continued; it involved interests and questions of the greatest magnitude; it contradicted the most fixed persuasions and prejudices of the persons to whom it was addressed; it required from those who accepted it, not a simple, indolent assent, but a change of principles and conduct; a submission to consequences the most serious and deterring, to loss and danger, to insult, outrage, and persecution. How such a story should be false; or, if false, how under such circumstances it should make its way, I think impossible to be explained; yet such the Christian story was; such were the circumstances under which it came forth, and in opposition to such difficulties did it prevail.

An event so connected with the religion and fortunes of the Jewish people, that one of their race has established his authority and law throughout a great portion of the civilised world, could not fail to be

¹ See Powell's Discourses, disc. xv. p. 245.

noticed in their prophetic writings; especially when this Person caused to be acknowledged, together with his own mission, the divine original of their institution, by those who before had rejected it. Accordingly, we perceive in these writings various intimations concurring in the person and history of Jesus, in a manner and degree, in which passages taken from these books could not be made to concur in any person, except him, who has been the author of great changes in the affairs and opinions of mankind. Of some of these predictions the weight depends a good deal on the concurrence: others possess great separate strength: one in particular does this in an eminent degree. It is an entire description directed to one character and to one scene of things; it is extant in a writing declaredly prophetic; and it applies to Christ's character, and to the circumstances of his life and death, in a way which no diversity of interpretation has been able to confound. That the advent of Christ, and the consequences of it, should not have been more distinctly revealed in the Jewish sacred books, is in some measure accounted for by the consideration, that for the Jews to have foreseen the fall of their old institution, and a rise of a new one more perfect, would have cooled too much their zeal for it, and have thus interfered with the preservation in the world of the remains of religious truth.

Of what a revelation discloses to mankind, only one question can properly be asked, Was it of importance to mankind to know, or to be better assured of? In this question, the great Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and of a future judgment, admit of no doubt. He who gives me riches or honors, does nothing; he who even gives me health; does little, in comparison with him, who lays before me just grounds for expecting a restoration to life, and a day of account and retribution. This Christianity has done for millions.

Other articles of the Christian faith, though of infinite importance when placed beside other topics of human inquiry, are only adjuncts to this. They are, however, worthy of the original to which we ascribe them. The morality of the religion is, in all its parts, wise and pure; neither adapted to vulgar prejudices, nor flattering popular notions, nor excusing established practices; but calculated, by its matter, to promote happiness, and by its form, to produce effect; a morality, which, let it have proceeded from any person whatever, would have been evidence of the soundness of his understanding and the probity of his designs, more perfect than could have been expected from the natural circumstances and character of the person who delivered it; and which is, and hath been, most beneficial to mankind.

On the greatest, therefore, of all possible occasions, and for a purpose of inestimable value, it pleased the Deity to vouchsafe a miraculous attestation. Having done this for the institution, when this alone could fix its authority, or give to it a beginning, he committed its future progress to the natural means of human communication, and to the influence of those causes by which human conduct and affairs are governed. The seed once sown was left to vegetate; the leaven inserted was left to ferment; and both according to the laws of nature, disposed and controlled by that Providence, which conducts the affairs of the universe, though by an influence inscrutable, and generally undistinguishable by us. And in this, Christianity is analogous to most other provisions for happiness. The provision is made; and, being made, is left to act according to laws, which, forming a part of a more general system, regulate this particular subject, in common with many others.

Let the constant recurrence to our observation of contrivance, design, and wisdom in the works of nature, once fix on our minds the belief of a God, and

all is easy. In the counsels of a Being possessed of the power and disposition which the Creator of the universe must possess, it is neither improbable that there should be a future state, nor that we should be made acquainted with it. A future state rectifies every thing ; because, if moral agents be at last happy or miserable, according to their conduct in the stations in which they are placed here, it seems not very material how these stations are determined. This hypothesis, therefore, solves all that objection to the divine care and goodness, which the promiscuous distribution of good and evil is apt on so many occasions to create. This one truth changes the nature of things ; gives order to confusion ; makes the moral world of a piece with the natural.

Nevertheless, a higher degree of assurance than that, which it is possible to draw from the light of nature, was necessary to overcome the shock, which the imagination receives from the effects of death, and the obstruction which thence arises to the expectation of a future existence. This difficulty, however strong, will be found on reflection to reside more in our habits of apprehension, than in the subject. Abstractedly considered, there is nothing more in the resurrection of a dead man than in the conception of a child ; except it be, that the one comes into his world with a system of prior consciousness about him, which the other does not ; and no person will say, that he knows enough of either subject to perceive, that this circumstance makes such a difference in the two cases, that the one should be easy, and the other impossible ; the one natural, the other not so. To the first man, the succession of the species would be as incomprehensible, as the resurrection of the dead is to us.

Thought is different from motion, perception from impact : the individuality of a mind is hardly consistent with the divisibility of an extended substance ; or its volition, that is, its power of originating motion,

with the inertness which cleaves to every portion of matter which our observation or experiments can reach. These distinctions lead us to an immaterial principle : at least, they so negative the mechanical properties of matter, in the constitution of a sentient, still more of a rational being, that no argument, drawn from these properties, can be of any weight in opposition to other reasons, when the question respects the changes of which such a nature is capable, or the manner in which these changes are effected. Whatever thought be, or on whatever it depend, the experience of sleep makes one thing concerning it certain, that it can be completely suspended and completely restored.

If any one find it too great a strain on his thoughts, to admit the notion of a substance strictly immaterial, that is, from which extension and solidity are excluded, he can find no difficulty in allowing, that a particle more minute than all conceivable dimensions, may just as easily be the depositary, the organ, and the vehicle, of consciousness, as the congeries of animal substance, which forms a human body, or the human brain ; that, being so, it may transfer a proper identity to whatever shall hereafter be united to it ; may be safe amidst the destruction of its integuments ; may connect the natural with the spiritual, the corruptible with the glorified body. If it be said, that the mode and means of all this is imperceptible by our senses, it is only what is true of the most important agencies and operations. The great powers of nature are all invisible. Gravitation, electricity, magnetism, though constantly present, and constantly exerting their influence within us, near us, and about us ; diffused through all space, overspreading the surface, or penetrating the contexture of all bodies with which we are acquainted, depend on substances and actions totally concealed from our senses. The Supreme Intelligence is so himself.

But whether these or any other attempts to satisfy the imagination, bear any resemblance to the truth, or whether the imagination, which is a mere slave of habit, can be satisfied or not ; when a future state, and the revelation of a future state, is not only perfectly consistent with the attributes of the Being who governs the universe ; but when it alone removes the appearances of contrariety, which attend the operations of his will towards creatures capable of comparative merit and demerit, of reward and punishment ; when a strong body of historical evidence, confirmed by many internal tokens of truth and authenticity, gives us just reason to believe that such a revelation has actually been made ; we ought to set our minds at rest with the assurance, that in the resources of Creative Wisdom, expedients cannot be wanting to carry into effect what the Deity has purposed : that either a new and mighty influence will descend on the human world to resuscitate extinguished consciousness ; or that amidst the other wonderful contrivances with which the universe abounds, and by some of which we see animal life, in many instances, assuming improved forms of existence, acquiring new organs, perceptions, and sources of enjoyment, provision is also made, though by methods secret to us, for conducting the objects of God's moral government, through the necessary changes of their frame, to those final distinctions of happiness and misery, which he has declared to be reserved for obedience and transgression, for virtue and vice, for the use and neglect, the right and wrong employment, of the faculties and opportunities with which he has been pleased, severally, to entrust, and to try us.

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